



Good mental health is critical to every child's success in school and life. This is particularly true for students with disabilities, who, according to recent research, are more likely to experience social isolation from peers and suffer from depression in adulthood. Students with disabilities may need additional support to process the news and adapt to the many changes we are all facing. Professionals working with students with disabilities (SWD) need to proactively support both academic and social-emotional needs.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Students with disabilities are at higher risk for experiencing lower levels of social-emotional well-being than their peers without disabilities.
- Personality shifts, and/or a regression in skills can occur as a result of daily routines being disrupted. This can present differently from child to child, for example, a student may become short-tempered, easily frustrated, highly distractible or hyperactive.
- Students with disabilities may be lonely and in need of some additional attention and support from parents or siblings during this time.
- Students with disabilities may experience increased anxiety as they approach learning in a virtual environment as they don't have access to the same support as they would in a typical school environment.
- By addressing student's emotional wellness, strengthening their social support networks and their skills in self-management, educators can help to support students' overall well-being and academic success.

### COMMON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL CHALLENGES FOR SOME STUDENTS

- The ability to remain optimistic, resilient, and confident in order to persevere through challenging situations.
- The ability to interpret others' behavior, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with peers and adults.
- The ability to identify, express, and regulate emotions, as well as understand the emotions of others.
- The ability to be self-aware of one's thoughts, behaviors, values, goals, strengths, attitudes, challenges, and mindsets, and how these impact behavior and choices.
- The ability to self-manage, navigate and shift in a healthy way one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
- Children with disabilities, particularly those with more severe disabilities, frequently face considerable problems in developing meaningful relationships with peers.

### EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELLNESS NEEDS

- Encourage students to try by reminding them of past successes and structuring statements of praise, feedback and encouragement in a "growth mindset format."
- Remember that behavior is a form of communication. Try to look past the behavior to uncover the unmet need, or uncomfortable emotion a student may be experiencing.
- Recognize a student's struggle and offer reassurance instead of a correction. Help them to identify their emotion and explain that it is okay to feel stressed, frustrated, sad, angry or worried. Offer coping strategies or just listen.
- Model, teach, and review effective problem-solving. Teach a struggling student (or a whole class) how first to choose one problem to tackle and then to break it into small, easy steps.
- Devote time to building community, reflecting on experiences, and listening to student's ideas, concerns, or stories.
- Support students in developing relationship-building and conflict-resolution skills by helping them co-create shared agreements for their new class or distance learning environment.
- Create individual plans for ongoing self-care with students and their families.
- Incorporate activities that also provide an opportunity for students to connect or reflect on their emotions. For example: journaling, letter writing, artwork, virtual lunch bunches, or other creating outlets.



How can I routinely embed social-emotional supports into my lessons or interventions?

How can I help my students express and identify their emotions in a healthy way?

How can I communicate with parents/guardians to best understand how my students are coping with the changes occurring around them?

How can I assist families in providing structure and familiar routines in the home environment?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

How can I serve as a bridge to connect families with community resources they may need?

How can I make sure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in meaningful virtual social interactions with peers?



## IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

The mental health of students is intimately linked to the well-being of their parents, guardians, and teachers. Implementing your own self-care strategies and providing parents/guardians with tools to do the same is a critical component to safeguarding the mental health of all students. Stress is natural and inevitable during crisis situations such as this. Caring for students in distress or with high needs can take a toll on educators. It is essential that educators practice self-awareness and recognize changes in behavior, work, and life outside of work to prevent compassion fatigue.

### PARENTAL/ CAREGIVER WELLNESS CONTROL PANEL

#### STUDENT & FAMILY RESOURCES

[SOCIAL STORIES AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS](#)

[CRITICAL DECISION POINTS FOR FAMILIES OF SWD](#)

[BUILDING LEARNING INTO NATURAL HOME ROUTINES](#)

[VDOE ENGAGE YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER](#)

[I'M DETERMINED RESOURCES](#)

[SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES](#)

#### TOOLS, INFORMATION, & SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

[5 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS DURING DISTANCE LEARNING](#)

[NCTSN: RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES](#)

[TRAUMA, INTELLECTUAL & DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY TOOLKIT](#)

[PRACTICE TO ADDRESS EMOTIONAL WELLNESS SKILL DEFICITS](#)

[HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TRY: GROWTH MINDSET STATEMENTS](#)

[TEACHER SELF-ASSESSMENT: SEL THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING](#)

#### SELF-CARE RESOURCES

[AT INTERSECTION OF TRAUMA AND DISABILITIES: A TOOLKIT FOR PROVIDERS](#)

[COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FAMILIES](#)

[CASEL CARES: BE YOUR BEST SELF WEBINAR](#)

[HEADSPACE](#)

[COMBAT COMPASSION FATIGUE](#)