



WHAT HELPS

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT TO IDAHO SCHOOL RESPONSE PROTOCOLS TO SUICIDE OR OTHER SUDDEN DEATH

- Just listening to children without advising them can help them feel as if they are appreciated. Although as caring people, the inclination is to jump in with solutions, listeners can ask what the child would like to do about the issue or ask if they need help. Often, just being heard will give children what they need to solve the problem. Listeners need to ask what helps most when the child is down or what they have done to get through similar tough times. Children may like to draw or color the “what helps” ideas to post on their wall.
- Children need to know that they are part of a family, no matter what its configuration. Words such as “you belong here” or “No matter what, we are here for you” can go a long way to increasing belongingness. Hugs and smiles also build in that belongingness, and the giver is likely to get them back.
- Emphasizing that everyone has tough times, no matter what they project or show on social media, helps youth to know that they are not unique when life is getting them down. Adults can model, even share, that they had a tough time and share (positive) ways they got through. Sharing about family history and what ancestors overcame informs youth that they belong to a hardy stock and that people in their family rely on each other and their strengths to weather tough times. If Grandpa never relied on anyone, that is NOT a story to tell, as all people need to know they have others to help.
- Families can brainstorm “what helps me when I am having a tough time” with adults joining in to talk about who/what gets them through. Think in terms of people, places, activities that one does with others and alone, etc. A list posted on the fridge, with drawings from younger kids, reminds everyone to use their strengths when needed. “What helps” needs to be positive behaviors as using substances may be helpful in the short run, youth need to know that this is not necessarily go to help and can harm in the long run.
- Research shows that families whose members eat together at least four times a week help their children to flourish. Eventually families might have children decide what to eat, help with shopping online, meal preparation, and clean up. This needs to be age-appropriate and tolerance for much imperfection. No electronics at the meal.
- Gratitude research shows that all people can change their brain if they write/text/or tell someone three times a day something that they are grateful for. This becomes

habit after 21 days, but everyone should look every day for what is good in their world. This helps our brains to become more positive and productive and lessen negative feelings and self-talk.

- Families should find an activity to do together that everyone can do (or rotate through family members and everyone takes turns providing an idea). Action activities help the most as this focuses the brain away from toxic stress. Bike riding, walking or hiking, baking cookies, cleaning a garage or closet together, writing and acting and filming a skit, etc., are some ideas. Taking turns to plan a family night in which EVERYONE participates may be fun. Even young children have games and ideas to share.
- Volunteering is another activity, especially done as a family or friend group, which can get the brain through tough times. Helping a family member, the community, or even a good cause will provide a “sad” or worried brain some distraction and bathe it in “feel good” chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. Volunteerism also builds self-esteem and provides meaning to people’s lives. This can be simple: clean the road in a block every week (socially distancing), make and take cookies to a neighbor, help with flower beds for an older family member, collect cat/dog food for a shelter, read to anyone even over a social network, clean closets and toy bins to donate to charity, etc. Obviously, activities must be appropriate age-wise and observe social distancing for now.
- New research has found that knitting and crocheting are proving to be antidotes to anxiety and worry. Schools and families might consider adding this activity to their collection of healthy activities. A lunchtime school group could be beneficial for youth struggling with anxiety or having a difficult fitting in with other students. Benefits of these activities include having fun, building camaraderie and belongingness, learning a new skill, and working together on a project all while decreasing anxiety. You can learn more about how crocheting helps the brain from the [Anxiety Resource Center](#).

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