



Upcoming Events

The calendar of Wellness events is now published on the MSD website. [Click here](#) for links to information and registration.

March-May: Brain-Based Parenting with Dr. Alison Roy

March 16th and 30th : Dr. Peg Dawson
Executive Functioning Skills for adolescents

March 2022

Helping Children Talk about Hard Things

How do we talk to children about conflict, crisis or war? How do we help them cope with information that may be scary and



"It is only natural that we and our children find many things that are hard to talk about. But anything human is mentionable and anything mentionable is manageable. The mentioning can be difficult, and the managing too, but both can be done if we are surrounded by love and trust."
~Fred Rogers

emotionally difficult even for adults to process? Fred Rogers understood that children of all ages benefit from opportunities to share and talk about hard things with those they "love and trust." Such discussions can help children thrive, even in the face of adversity.

[The National Association for School Psychologists \(NASP\) has put together a thorough, brief guide that offers insight about how to respond in developmentally appropriate ways to support young people during this time.](#) Three areas of focus are:

- Make time to listen and affirm what children are feeling
- Reassure safety
- Empower kids to help others (Support youth advocacy)

Listening and Offering Reassurance

During conversations, educators and families can answer questions, help children identify feelings, clarify thinking, and correct misinformation or misunderstandings. We can set a reassuring and supportive tone during conversations by recalling that there are many brave and helpful people working to solve this problem and to protect us and keep us safe.

It is helpful to remember that we don't have to have all the answers when we show empathy for someone. We can hold a safe space for our children to experience uncomfortable feelings and help them process emotions by actively listening: *"It sounds like you are feeling _____. That makes sense. I feel that too sometimes."*

Coping Skills

Conversations with children of all ages can be paired with a discussion about coping skills, such as tapping into social connections, using one's imagination, doing physical

April 21st: Save the Date! Screening of LIKE (film about Social Media Addiction) with panelists. Registration not yet available.

Wellness Resources

- If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call the Rapid Response Access Point at 1-833-710-6477
- To connect with non-crisis resources and support in NH, call NAMI at 800-242-6264 or dial 211
- Use the [MSD Family Resource Guide](#) to find information on many important resources.
- Any employee or volunteer in district can access a multitude of services and supports through the Employee Assistance Program. Call: 1-800-759-8122 or go to: www.mylifeexpert.com (username: [healthtrust](#); password: [resources](#))

Check out the [Community Helpers](#) flier for information about supports available for families.

activities, expressing emotions, or engaging with cognitive activities, such as puzzles or problem solving. (For more information about these coping styles, [click here](#).) This might sound like: “_____ happened and now you feel _____. We will get through this together – what do you need right now?”

Service and Advocacy

Finding ways to help others during a crisis can feel empowering during a time when we often feel most powerless. Even the youngest children have a strong sense of [altruism](#), and service opportunities leverage this instinct for generosity and compassion. These types of activities help kids feel connected to others and foster a sense of belonging and affiliation. This moves the conversation from “I feel,” to “we can.”

Additional Suggestions

In addition to suggesting that we reaffirm safety, make time to talk, and facilitate youth advocacy for children and youth of all ages, NASP also stresses the importance of:

- Reducing exposure to media,
- Maintaining normal routines,
- [Monitoring emotional states](#), and,
- Promoting home-school communication when specific situations arise in either location.

Helping Elementary Children

NASP stresses that with young children, we can answer questions that are on their minds. Young children who are exposed to media images may have difficulty interpreting them, and [misunderstandings](#) can easily take root. Adults need not force participation in conversations but checking in with children is important. It is helpful to offer reassurance about personal safety, keep information brief and simple, and avoid scary information.

Older Children and Youth

Older children might have more questions about the conflict itself or be emotionally reactive to news. It is important to show empathy and work to understand their point of view. With so much exposure to social media, it will be helpful to guide older children toward trustworthy news sources. Additionally, young people may need help moderating the amount of disturbing or graphic news they consume. It is important to check-in with them often and to talk about what they are thinking and feeling. In school, [offering opportunities for guided discussions](#) and connecting what is happening in the world to other learning can help students contextualize the conflict.

Ensuring a Welcoming and Safe Community for All

The Merrimack School District celebrates diversity and seeks to be inclusive of all. At times like these, we want to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that every student feels that school is a safe haven, a warm and welcoming environment in which to learn, socialize and grow. We are sensitive to the fact that some members of our community have cultural ties to Ukraine or Russia, and that our military families may also feel the impact of this conflict. While we create a positive climate, our community also strives to be responsive to the individual needs of students.

If you have questions or concerns, or would like to talk further about this topic, please feel free to reach out to me.

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References/Resources for Families and Educators

[Supporting Youth Affected by the War in Ukraine: Tips for Educators and Caregivers](#)

[How to recognize signs of distress](#)

[How to talk to your kids about conflict and war: 8 Tips](#)

[Sentence Starters to Speak with Empathy](#)

[A Guide to Teacher Resources](#)

Parent Information about Supporting [Elementary](#) and [Middle](#) Schoolers from the American Psychological Assoc.



Students and teachers talk about SEL in [videos](#) presented to the Merrimack School Board in February.

Every Day We are Learning

By Amanda Gorman

Every day we are learning

How to live with essence, not ease.

How to move with haste, never hate.

How to leave this pain that is beyond us
Behind us.

Just like a skill or any art,

We cannot possess hope without practicing it.

It is the most fundamental craft we demand
Of ourselves.