

# **Are the Kids Alright?**

## **Post (or Late) Pandemic Assessment**

**SAIS Institute for Heads**

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### **Parents and Educators Have Been Worried About Children's Health and Mental Health from the Start of the Pandemic.**

- Parents have worried that their children were being TRAUMATIZED. They have seen them anxious, angry, sad, upset, isolated and discouraged
- Parents have themselves been VERY ANXIOUS and have brought their worries to their child's school

### **We Have Been Through a Lot, But the Vast Majority of Children Have Not Been Traumatized.**

- The Pandemic has been grueling, isolating and scary.
- We have all had to talk to children about life and death and safety AND SO MUCH UNCERTAINTY
- Trauma has become the all-purpose psychological term for distress. We are all PTSD.
- trauma has a particular meaning in psychiatry
- WE ARE NOT SEEING TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS
- What Is Trauma?
- Trauma is **an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster**. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.
- TRAUMA IS DOSE-RELATED
- OVERWHELMING...HELPLESSNESS...SHOCK

### **WHAT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN A STRESSFUL TIME?**

- Children exposed to natural disasters, war, terrorism and severe political violence have The

## World's Psychological Immune System Turned Out To Be More Robust Than We Expected

- *The Pandemic Did Not Affect Mental Health the Way You Think* by Lara Aknin, Jamil Saki, and Elizabeth Dunn *The Atlantic*, 2021
- *The Lancet's COVID-19 Commission Mental Health Task Force reviewed more than 1,000 studies from around the globe*
- *A study of 50,000 people in the U.K. showed that in April of 2020, 27% showed clinically significant levels of distress compared with 19% before the pandemic. By the summer of 2020 psychological distress returned to pre-pandemic levels*
- *Life satisfaction remained the same on the Gallup World Poll*
- *Suicides did not increase in 21 countries. Declined in California*

## The Pandemic Has Hit Different Populations Unequally

- According to Boston University Professor of Psychology Donna Pincus
- **“The mental health impacts of the pandemic seemed to ripple along the fault lines of inequality...leaving many children who were already at a disadvantage suffering the most.”**
- Is there a child mental health crisis in the U.S.? Yes, a pre-existing crisis: too few therapists, too few hospital beds.
- Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued a report in December, 2021. Citing Increases in depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation from 2010 to 2019.
- A cry for help': CDC warns of a steep decline in teen mental health  
More than 4 in 10 told the health agency they felt “persistently sad or hopeless.” An increase from 37% pre-pandemic to 44% post-pandemic.
- The most vulnerable teens lived in homes where:
  - 1) family members died of Covid
  - 2) there wasn't enough to eat
  - 3) children exposed to domestic violence or abuse.
- “All students were impacted by the pandemic, but not all students were impacted equally,” The CDC's Ethier said.

## Some Suggestions for Programs to Support Mental Health in Schools

- **Support starts at the top.** Regular, support groups for heads of school led by veteran retired heads or by veteran clinicians with school experience.
- **Caring for the caregivers.** Regular support groups for counselors in international settings led by senior mental health professionals.
- **Training teachers** the “therapeutic moment” in the classroom in order to help anxious or sad children feel safe and connected.
- **Training administrators** in managing parent anxiety and conflict between adults in the community.

## What Should Schools Be Doing?

- “Schools nurture many of the adaptive systems in the individual that generate capacity for resilience over the course of development.” Ann S. Masten, Distinguished McKnight Professor, University of Minnesota
- **POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMPETENT AND CARING ADULTS**
- **WARMTH**
- **STRUCTURE AND PREDICTABILITY**
- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS**
- **BUILDING MOTIVATION SELF-EFFICACY THROUGH ROLE-MODELING, SCAFFOLDING, INDIVIDUAL GOAL-SETTING AND GUIDED MASTERY EXPERIENCES.**
- **A CHANCE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL THEIR COVID COPING STORIES**

Anna Freud wrote, “Good teaching is good therapy.” Some children will also need therapy. All children need good teaching.