



# Are the Kids Alright? Post(or Late) Pandemic Assessment

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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 INTERNATIONAL 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 been studied: 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Palestine
- ▶ *War and Children (1943)* by Ann Freud and Dorothy Burlingham
- ▶ *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development (2014)* by Ann S. Masten
- ▶ **PROTECTIVE FACTORS:**
  - ▶ **ATTACHMENT.** The responses of parents or surrogate caregivers play a key role in the responses of children
  - ▶ **COMMUNITY, CULTURE, SCHOOL**
  - ▶ **FAITH, HOPE AND BELIEF THAT LIFE HAS MEANING**
  - ▶ **INTELLIGENCE, PROBLEM-SOLVING CAPABILITIES, SELF-REGULATION AND SELF-DIRECTION**



# 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 International 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.