

August 2020

# ONcall

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## inside

### **Communications staff must be part of the decision-making team**

Communications staff members are a valuable part of the executive administration team, and they should have a seat at the table to help with strategic planning. Read why this key member of your staff can provide much more to your district than just newsletters and website content.

### **How and why to write a letter to the editor**

Newspaper readership is declining, but most local papers still have loyal readers who appreciate local news. These people read the letters-to-the-editor section faithfully. When you are building support for an initiative, letters to the editor can help build community support. Read more about how to organize letter writers who can help share information through their local paper.

### **Making social media a priority this school year — in five simple tips!**

Social media is not new, but some districts have not joined yet. This tip sheet will help districts start or plan for next year. Facebook is an essential platform. Read tips for getting started or improving your current site.

### **School board members can create cooperation from confrontation**

When tempers can flare, how do you respond? The school board can be a magnet for complaints and frustrations. Help your board diffuse conflict and respond constructively when confrontations are heated.

### **What can schools say about current hot-button issues?**

The current social and political climate may create tensions among people with opposing views. When school resumes, these issues will likely come into the buildings. It's important to know how to handle issues such as racism, the role of law enforcement, and health, with tact. Set your goals early and reflect now on how to respond to these current hot-button issues.

### **INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Validate your kids' feelings**

The worry about COVID-19 and the disruptions to daily life can put a strain on us all. Kids are no exception. We can't change these external factors, but we can minimize the anxiety that children are feeling if we listen and validate their feelings without judgment. Read some suggested prompts to help children share their feelings and learn how to respond productively.

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For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

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## Communications staff must be part of the decision-making team

How does your district treat communications staff? Do they have a seat at the table when it comes to district decision-making, or are they on clean-up duty?

Unfortunately, communications specialists in some districts spend far too much time trying to “clean up” after communications fiascos rather than helping to shape the initial thought processes and messaging.

It’s much more effective when districts include their communications specialists on the district leadership team. They can help think through important decisions before they happen and help shape the action and the way they are presented.

### Communicating is a strategic activity

Some superintendents view communications as more of a task than a strategic activity. They think it’s enough to just send out a monthly newsletter and post a few photos on the district’s Facebook page. But effective communications involves so much more.

One of the most important roles of the communications specialist is to see the big picture. He or she can help leaders consider a decision both from the district’s perspective and help assess of how it will be perceived by different stakeholders. A savvy communications pro can help districts consider viewpoints and options beyond the obvious. That way, the district can make adjustments before a plan is presented, rather than do damage control afterward.

There are ways to avoid, or at least minimize, the backlash that can accompany unpopular decisions. But it requires knowing in advance the potential fallout and developing strategies for dealing with it. One way is by involving potential opponents in thoughtful discussion and idea-sharing before a decision is made when their feedback could be used to help shape the proposal and mitigate possible problems.

Another is to develop a communications strategy for a particular action, providing detailed information and rationale during the planning phase, so that stakeholders don’t feel a decision was “sprung” on them.

Districts with communications specialists have taken the first step in creating a solid public relations program. But it’s important to take the next step to include that position on your leadership team, where the communications specialist can provide research, strategic thinking, wise counseling and effective services to help meet the needs of the district.

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## Here are some tips to help communicators who want to be a valued part of the team:

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**Stay current on tools and trends.** Most people prefer receiving information electronically, but there is no one tool that's best to deliver it. New tools are available almost daily, and old tools are updated with new features. It's important to stay up to date and help your leadership team choose the best tools for a particular message.

**Educate yourself.** Professional development is as important for communicators as it is for teachers and principals. Make it a priority to attend conferences and trainings related to school communications. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) offers an outstanding conference every July for school communicators, and there are local chapters in nearly every state. Be sure to share what you learn with your leadership team. You not only build support for new strategies or programs you might want to try but also confidence in your expertise and knowledge.

**Network!** Networking is a critical tool for cultivating fresh ideas and building community support. Cultivate relationships with community religious leaders, business partners, civic groups, parent clubs and others. The more you can involve your community during good times, the more likely they will also support you when times are tougher.

**Create a communications plan and share it.** Cranking out press releases and producing publications can feel productive, but without a master plan, it might be a lot of effort for tasks that aren't yielding the best results. Involve your stakeholders in setting priorities and creating your plan. Once you're specific about what you are trying to accomplish, you will be able to better target your audience and methods of communication. Most importantly, share your plan with district leaders. This will provide accountability and help them realize that effective communications is not a hit-or-miss proposition. It must be well planned and executed.

**See and be seen.** Visit schools regularly with camera in hand. Take photos to post on Facebook and the website. Gather stories you can tell to civic clubs. Make sure staff know you're there to help them.

**Coach and teach the team.** Share your knowledge and expertise with your administrative team. Meet at least annually with principals to review their communications efforts — newsletters, website, etc. — and offer suggestions. Maybe it's time to discontinue their printed newsletter and start a blog. Offer to create a school brochure that they can give to prospective families. Make yourself invaluable to them.

**Build trust.** In whatever you do, be direct, honest and reliable. Leaders need to have confidence that you are providing solid information and not just offering seat-of-the-pants recommendations. If you say you can complete a project by a certain deadline, make sure you deliver. Be someone your team can rely on for sensible, solid advice.

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*Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant*

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## How and why to write a letter to the editor

The decline in newspaper readership and the rise of social media has reshaped media relations for many communications professionals. Messaging in local media was an important part of communications planning. A good plan included strategies and responses to media coverage — whether it was reactive based on current news or proactive messaging through news releases and opinion editorials.

Times are changing for newsrooms. As readership declines, newspapers are folding or significantly reducing staff.

According to the Pew Research Center:

“The estimated total U.S. daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in 2018 was 28.6 million for weekday and 30.8 million for Sunday, down 8% and 9%, respectively, from the previous year. Weekday print circulation decreased 12% and Sunday print circulation decreased 13%.” [www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers](http://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers)

### Don't dismiss letters to the editor

People who subscribe to local newspapers generally like to read local news. This may explain why, according to a study commissioned by Legacy.com, the obituary section is one of the most-read parts of the local paper. (<https://legcy.co/38EiVcM>)

Letters to the editor have been popular for the same reason: people like to hear from and about their neighbors. We can find plenty of opinions on social media, but letters to the editor still have merit:

- They are published by a media source that has a set of standards for sharing a balanced range of views.
- They are concise, with a typical word limit of 150 to 250 words.
- They allow readers to see a range of opinions about current issues.
- They are transparent — prior to publishing, the writer's identity is verified.
- The audience reach goes beyond an individual's social media circle and is not part of a paid advertisement.
- They are often posted in print and digital editions and are shareable to readers' individual social media channels.

### Planning for letters to the editor

The value of letters to the editor is in the authorship. Reserve opinions from the superintendent and school board chair for opinion editorials — slightly longer format with more stringent guidelines for publication because fewer are published.

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Letters to the editor can be valuable for non-administrative staff or community members who would like to share their experiences, support or opposition to initiatives. District staff can suggest them or provide tips for sharing views about important issues that affect schools and education.

Letters to the editor may cross into prohibited advocacy issues. Beware of the restrictions on political activity in your state and ensure that the district does not influence the viewpoints expressed in these letters.

### **Tips for effective letters to the editor**

The National Education Association recommends letters to the editor as an effective means of providing information to legislators. “Letters to the editor can provide readers with information and insights on issues with which they may be unfamiliar, and can also inspire readers to take action.” Read tips from NEA about effective letters to the editor: [www.nea.org/home/19683.htm](http://www.nea.org/home/19683.htm)

- Keep it brief and discuss only one issue.
- Get to the point and include clear factual points.
- Relate the issue to local interests.
- Personalize the issue by sharing an example of how it impacts your community or someone in your local community.
- End with a call to action, such as reaching out to your legislator.
- Be timely. The issue should have relevance to an initiative or decision currently under consideration.
- Be professional. Submit a legible letter that follows the newspaper’s guidelines and is polite.
- Identify yourself. Provide contact information to help the paper verify the letter’s authenticity.

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### **Sample guidelines for stakeholders and patrons**

*(Remember to check election laws in your state for restrictions on political activities.)*

### **Your School District Measure xx-xxx: Letters to the Editor Guidelines**

The best letters to the editor include a brief statement about the bond measure and a personal point of view. Why are these projects important to you and our community? The letters are brief and should clearly state the author’s support. A sample is below, but writers should personalize their own.

#### **Submission guidelines:**

The *Newspaper Times* limits political letters to 200 words.

**Submit letters to the online submission form: [www.emailmeform.com](http://www.emailmeform.com)**

#### **Recommendations**

Paragraph 1: Introduce the issue and begin to state your case. Add a personal view or details about how the local schools or education in general has impacted you, your family or your community.

*This is an uncertain time, but we can do something good for our community that will last long into the future. Your School Measure xx-xxx will be on the May ballot and has needed these*

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*updates since I was in high school 20 years ago. Our students should not have to walk around buckets in the hallways when it rains because the roof is leaking.*

Paragraph 2: In the next section, state one or two key points to support your position. *School District is proposing a bond measure for the May election that will make critical repairs to our schools and improve safety and security for students and staff. Our schools are old—the average age is 55—and they haven't had major repairs or updates since the last bond in 2001. That bond is expiring. Now is the time to replace it and make repairs to protect our school buildings—without raising the tax rate.*

In the conclusion, sum up your argument and ask for support for the measure or provide directions for getting more details about the plan. Please join me in voting yes for our community and our future. Or, Learn more about the proposal at [www.sdbond2020.com](http://www.sdbond2020.com). With your support, we can fix our schools and protect our investment in these buildings.

### **Sample Letter**

*To the Editor,*

*This is an uncertain time, but we can make a difference. School Measure xx-xxx will be on the May ballot. I am voting yes because schools are essential to a healthy community, and our schools need these critical repairs and safety updates. I went to the high school 20 years ago, and these repairs were needed then!*

*The School District bond measure will be on the May ballot. It only includes the most essential projects, identified by a community-based facility task force. Our schools are old—the average age is 55—and they haven't had major repairs or updates since the last bond in 2001. Waiting to fix them will cost more later, and these projects will save thousands of dollars in annual costs for operations and maintenance.*

*The last bond is expiring. Now is the time to replace it and make repairs to protect our school buildings — without raising the tax rate.*

*Please join me in voting yes for our community and our future. **Or**, learn more about the proposal at [www.sdbond2020.com](http://www.sdbond2020.com). Support this plan to fix our schools and protect our investment in these buildings.*

*Sincerely,  
Your Name*

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*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*

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## Making social media a priority this school year — in five simple tips!

Looking back over the last eight months, a lot has changed.

But do you know what hasn't changed? The commitment your school has to students. Your community needs to be reminded of that now more than ever, and social media is a free tool to help you reach thousands of people on a daily basis.

If your schools are not already engaging on social media, here are five simple tips to help them get started. Let's celebrate the amazing things happening with your students and staff this school year.

### 1. Pick your platforms

Some schools try to do all the social platforms, and they end up being overwhelmed. Facebook is the place to be for your school. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn — I love them, too. Yet Facebook remains number one.

That one piece of wisdom should help a LOT. Focus on Facebook and then move on to others only when you feel you have mastered it. Many awesome schools are still just using Facebook. And that's OK.

You should be posting at least twice per day on Facebook when school is in session. Does this seem impossible? Well, keep reading! I have more tips to help.

### 2. Create a process to submit content

You can't possibly be everywhere at your school to take photos. I recommend asking staff to email photos and school updates to a central, singular email address.

Creating a general social media email address (like [socialmedia@myschool.com](mailto:socialmedia@myschool.com)) will help clear up any questions such as, "Who do I email this to?" Another option is to ask teachers to tag the school district in their posts if they are using social media for their classrooms already.

Get creative. The easier you make it, the more likely you will get photos. Enlist the help of your administrators to create an expectation of involvement from the staff. If they can help mandate that all staff members submit one to two items per month, you'll be overflowing with great stories to share. And if they are stumped on what stories to tell, then head to tip number three!

### 3. Give your staff ideas

Now that you have a system, make sure that your staff members know what you are looking for. Simple photos or videos of students at work in the classroom make great

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content. Of course, you'll share photos from outside the school as well, including field trips, special speakers, community projects, business partnerships, scholarships, and more.

Use this helpful list of 100 ideas to get your staff started: [100 Inspiring Ideas for School Social Media Posts](https://bit.ly/3iynSIv) (<https://bit.ly/3iynSIv>). Feel free to email this link directly to staff. And if you're still operating in a safer-at-home environment, this list of ideas will help: [50 Social Media Ideas for Temporarily Closed K-12 Schools](https://bit.ly/31Jra5T) (<https://bit.ly/31Jra5T>).

#### **4. Create a district hashtag**

Simply put, a hashtag is an easy way for people to search for tweets or posts that have a common topic. In this case, that topic is your school.

Hashtags allow everyone to become a storyteller for your school. At any given moment, there are hundreds of things happening inside your district. If you want all of those things to shine, you need a hashtag that everyone uses on social media!

It's fun to find and then share photos and videos that you locate by doing a hashtag search. If you repost photos on your own school page, you should always give a thank you to the originator of the content. Retweeting is another option to simply share the post on your Twitter feed.

Looking for ideas on great school district hashtags? Check out this helpful article: [15 Hip #Hashtags for Schools](https://bit.ly/2BFCJAK) (<https://bit.ly/2BFCJAK>).

#### **5. Report metrics**

You must share your social media wins with your staff. If you have a post that reaches 10,000 people, let them know about it! If you receive great comments, make sure to highlight them. Don't assume your staff reads every post on social media.

You should put together a report card to share metrics back with them. If they see the impact you are having, they will likely participate more in the future. Here is an example of a report card I send to my partner schools: <https://bit.ly/38teFNb>. You could easily create one similar to this.

There you go! I hope you enjoyed these five ideas to help make social media much easier this school year. If you have additional questions, don't hesitate to check out the resources available at [www.socialschool4edu.com](http://www.socialschool4edu.com).

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*Contributed by Written by Andrea Gribble. Andrea's passion is helping schools recognize their daily awesomeness and sharing that story with the world. Visit her website at [www.socialschool4edu.com](http://www.socialschool4edu.com) to learn about her services. #SocialSchool4EDU provides full social media management, personally coaches social media teams and individuals, and offers a vibrant online community that provides ongoing professional development.*

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## School board members can create cooperation from confrontation

School board members should be prepared to respond to conflict when they get elected. They will likely face conflict about a school board decision or as a result of the rising tension in the current political climate. They must develop skills to respond constructively and without escalating the situation.

No one likes to be a target of anger from parents, concerned taxpayers or dissatisfied employees. School board candidates should know that it is part of the job when they file for election. They should also know that their response can create a crisis or an opportunity.

### Turn a confrontation into an opportunity

When a concern reaches the school board, it is generally based on passionately felt and strongly held opinions. Most concerns shared at the school board have not been arrived at quickly or simply. A high level of concern, or even anger, takes time to fester. First, be thankful that they are now in the open. Problems and concerns are easier to solve when you know what they are.

If you can, try to bring out areas of concern before they bubble up by conducting a needs assessment and/or surveys about potentially controversial issues — or even regularly about operations and programs. By keeping your finger on the pulse of your community, you can anticipate issues.

Defensiveness can accelerate conflict. Defensive people are unsure of themselves and their knowledge surrounding the situation. Do your homework. Ask questions. Be prepared with as much information as possible.

Share reactions and comments you receive on policies and programs with the superintendent and your fellow board members. Ask them to do the same for you. Agree to a “no surprises” rule. If you foresee an issue on the horizon, encourage the superintendent to share facts with the media, your stakeholders, and internally with staff and on your website and social media.

### Tips for constructive responses

Be polite and civil, even when the attack is personal. This is difficult but important.

Listen. Let the person who is confronting you finish his or her comments. Then start verifying what you’ve heard by using such phrases as:

- “So you’re saying that. . .”
- “Let me make sure I understand you. . .”
- “I hear you saying. . .”

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Clarify by asking several “what” questions. Avoid “why” questions because they can make the other person defensive. Also, use personal language instead of accusatory language: “I feel confused,” rather than “You’re confusing me” and “I don’t think I’m making myself clear,” rather than “You don’t understand.”

When another person is aggressive or unrealistic, try looking at him or her calmly. Silence gives the person nothing to push against and can communicate power. In many cases, the aggression will dissipate and reasonable communication will be possible.

If the attack is personal or based on an extreme demand, act as if you didn’t hear it and refocus the discussion on the underlying problem or conflict. Ask the other person what they want from you.

### **Three types of conflict management**

Many of these tips are appropriate in specific situations because there are three types of conflict, each of which are managed differently. By managing conflict, you can manage your defensive responses and build relationships rather than hinder them.

Here are the three types of conflict and how they can be managed:

**1. Simple conflict** — This type of conflict occurs when two people know each other’s goals, but neither feels able to attain the desired goal without preventing the other from attaining his or her goal.

- Try to state the misunderstanding as clearly as possible.
- Use non-threatening or non-emotional language.
- Identify common goals that might supersede the goals on which you disagree.
- Ask for clarification.
- Try to work together to solve your problem.
- Wait before you make hasty comments. Sometimes another solution that neither of you considered will become apparent.
- Try to work together on the issue.

**2. Pseudo conflict** — This type of conflict occurs when people actually agree on an issue but are unable to communicate agreement.

- Verify that pseudo conflict exists by checking the other’s perceptions of what’s going on and reviewing whether you think there is really something wrong.
- Ask for clarification. The “what” questions come in handy.

**3. Ego conflict** — This occurs when a person is emotionally involved to a point where they feel a threat to the ego.

- Stop talking. In an ego-involved interaction, people put up barriers to cooperative communication. To manage ego conflicts, you have to lower those barriers. To do this, allow people to express concerns, but do not allow yourself to be punished.
- Try to steer discussion of the conflict to a factual basis.
- Try again.
- If you succeed this far, try to determine the real source of the conflict.

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## What can schools say about current hot-button issues?

What can schools say about current hot-button issues?

Schools are the heart of the community. That does not change in times of societal angst and polarization. Issues in the community also affect our schools.

Confronting the myriad of social issues — racism, the role of law enforcement, public health, and many more — can be worrisome, even scary. School districts serve the community by embracing these difficult conversations instead of evading them.

As a school communicator, you may be called upon to help lead those conversations, to provide guidance for those who do, and certainly to handle these topics appropriately in your own work.

Tactfully handling hot-button issues is not easy, although some folks seem to have an innate ability to do so. But these are skills all of us can develop. Reams have been written about how to effectively and respectfully engage communities in such discussions. I'm currently reading Glenn E. Singleton's "Courageous Conversations about Race," and there are many other excellent resources.

This essay is not a substitute for those in-depth studies, but I hope it will spur ideas on your part.

### Know where you are

Schools constitute a laboratory of civic engagement — teaching and illustrating how to engage in constructive dialogue to students, staff, and the community. It would be irresponsible for schools to teach about historic conflicts but ignore the conflicts of today. Such discussions bring curriculum to life, develop critical thinking skills, and create the foundation for generations of civic dialogue.

Disagreement is not bad, so long as it is rational and respectful. In fact, disagreement indicates that people are engaged. A first step is to recognize that we can welcome reasoned disagreement instead of seeking to avoid it. Still, it will be important to understand how your district, your office, and you personally, handle controversial issues. There likely are written policies; there probably are unwritten expectations as well.

You are blessed if you and your district have solid experience and credible expertise in such discussions. If not, it is better to take incremental steps than to do nothing. An attitude of "we don't talk about that" benefits no one. The conversations are going on whether we acknowledge them or not, and ignorance is not bliss.

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### **Recognize the goal**

The goal of these conversations, whether one-on-one or via social media or in face-to-face meetings, is to find common ground and build mutual understanding, not to decide who is right.

Changing others' minds is impossible. That is up to them. But thoughtful discussions can fertilize the ground so people are receptive to contrasting ideas, information, and interpretation.

In line with that, we need to recognize our own beliefs and biases, becoming aware of how they influence our interactions. Such self-awareness will help guard against our expectations for others to be like us, think like us, and do like us. That personal awareness also nurtures our desire to continue growing intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Lifelong learning applies not only to academic subjects but also to personal growth.

So invest in yourself. Educate yourself and expand your knowledge about the topic, no matter how much you think you know. Talk to colleagues and experts who have lived experience or are knowledgeable in other ways. Peruse social media to get a sense of community feelings. Read, listen to, and watch a cross-section of traditional news media and publishers.

Revitalize your daily routine. Visit — in-person or virtually — neighborhoods, businesses, religious institutions, organizations, and schools that you don't typically frequent. Expand your circle of coffee partners or lunch dates to include people whose backgrounds, situations, and beliefs contrast with your own.

All these interactions add to your skills and knowledge, while making each day a lot more interesting.

### **Pay attention to relevance**

In dealing with difficult issues, things will go smoother if you develop a sense of timing. Some emails, phone calls or other interactions call for an immediate response. Others do not. In either case, take time to think through your response beforehand; investing an extra minute, or several, could save you from future angst or misunderstandings.

In the same vein, some events will need a quick response to inform the public and to counter any disruptive or misleading statements on social media. Be prepared in your head, and in district protocols, for what you will need to address and when.

### **Construct the conversation**

Resources abound to learn how to conduct respectful conversations. Though many techniques sound simple and obvious, they require forethought and practice:

- Be respectful and be a positive example.
- Validate people's views but do not tolerate vulgar, abusive or demeaning comments.
- Listen without interrupting, listening closely to understand the other's perspective instead of focusing on your response.
- Silence is OK, allowing yourself or others time to think. Start with, "Give me a moment to think about that." Or if you've asked a question and expect an answer, your watchful silence likely will lead others to speak.
- Group discussions operate best with mutually accepted ground rules, including focusing on the idea and not the individual

- Avoid leading questions, such as, “Don’t you think ...?”
- Consider the unexpected and prepare for it. A conversation might take a questionable turn. Or participants might get upset. Someone might bait you or others into arguing. How will you respond?
- Check your own assumptions, biases, and generalizations. Each person’s experiences are unique, despite whatever similarities they share. Respect their individuality, not expecting them to be the spokesperson for a certain group or experience unless they assume that role.
- Acknowledge that each of us has more to learn.

Remember: Practice does not make perfect, but it does improve the odds of a positive outcome. Role-playing in your mind or in front of a mirror is helpful. Even better is practicing with others.

I hope you find these ideas helpful. To be alive is to be constantly learning.

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*Contributed by Dick Hughes, communications consultant. Contact him at [TheHughesisms@gmail.com](mailto:TheHughesisms@gmail.com).*



# Validate Your Kids' Feelings



**August  
2020**

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

At the risk of stating the obvious, this is a stressful time — for everyone.

It's important to remember the impact of this stressful time on our children. Young people are affected by outside stress — COVID-19-related disruptions to their routines and social lives, high levels of uncertainty and anxiety, and their parents' stress levels.

This stress is on top of the already rising levels of anxiety among children and teens, which are higher than any previous generation.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, "The total number of teenagers who recently experienced depression increased 59% between 2007 and 2017. The rate of growth was faster for teen girls (66%) than for boys (44%)." <https://pewrsr.ch/3gtwIFR>

### **How do you respond to your children's stress and anxiety?**

Stress among young people is not a new problem, but the current health, social and economic issues in our communities make it worse.

We can't change the external factors that cause stress — nor should we. Our children must learn the essential life skill of understanding their feelings and managing their responses to stressors outside of their control.

### **The value of validation**

Before kids can develop skills to manage their responses to external factors, they should understand that the feelings behind their reactions are valid. Feelings should not cause shame. Validating children's feelings teaches empathy, helps children feel understood, and creates a space for a calm reaction.

Dr. Jeffrey Bernstein, child psychologist, said this is essential for helping them build emotional health. "It is crucial to remember that when children feel validated, they will be better able to hear you and change their own behaviors... Validating your child's or teen's feelings is crucial to building his or her self-esteem and will promote solid, overall emotional health." <https://bit.ly/2NZ2YV7>

### **Tips to help validate your child's feelings**

- Communicate your intent to listen without judging or blaming.
- Be sensitive to feelings and acknowledge how difficult and even embarrassing it is to be "different" from everyone else.
- Acknowledge the problems in your child's life and convey that they matter. Do not dismiss their struggles.

- Reflect on how upsetting it feels to them when his/her emotions seem to spin out of control.
- Understand how deep shame, which you may not detect when you are frustrated, can keep influencing your child's behavior.
- Above all, be calm, do not try to problem solve, and resist being defensive. Try to see things from your child's perspective.

Validating does not mean that you are agreeing with everything your child says or trying to force them to turn their distress into a positive feeling.

### **Prompts to encourage sharing and express validation**

Parents are busy, and many are filtering their responses to children through their own childhood experiences. When children are distraught, it doesn't feel natural to listen without defensiveness or dismissiveness — a reaction may be to minimize concerns because they are only kids. It helps to reflect on how we feel when our feelings are dismissed out-of-hand.

Sharon Selby, a registered clinical counselor in private practice, shared a list of conversation prompts to foster empathy. (<https://bit.ly/3eMmboy>)

Ask your child to share a concern by starting with: I feel, I feel...because...and I need..., or I feel... when...and I wish...

Use one of the following validating statements for your nonjudgmental response:

- It sounds as though you're feeling...
- What I hear you saying is...
- You would like me to understand that you're feeling... because... and you wish...
- What I'm learning about you is...
- On a scale from 0-10 (with 0 being the worst and 10 being the best), how well did I summarize what you are thinking and feeling?
- Is there any part that I'm missing or not understanding well enough?
- What else would you like to tell me about your feelings and this concern?
- How can I support you?
- How long have you been feeling this way?
- What you would like me to know and understand better is...
- Thank you for being open and sharing your feelings with me. I really appreciate it and now have a better understanding of...
- I'm sorry that I didn't fully understand how you were feeling about... until now, and I'm grateful that you've shared this with me.

Find a pdf download with these 12 prompts on her website: <https://bit.ly/3eMmboy>

Selby offers a cautionary note:

Your child may bring up a concern from a few months ago or even a year ago, and that's okay. Remember the goals of this conversation. Your job is to deeply listen and understand your child's point of view. Do not judge what they are saying. They might be "testing the waters" to see if they can really trust you with deeper, more vulnerable feelings.