

Director of Pupil Personnel Services Update April 30, 2020

Dear Parents and Community Members,

I hope this letter finds you safe and well during this challenging time. This message provides you with some strategies to use with children to foster a positive and productive home environment during this time of school closure. As parents, we find ourselves in a position of juggling multiple responsibilities while needing to support our children. Therefore, the below strategies are taken from The Neuropsychology and Education Services for Children and Adolescents (NESCA) website (<https://nescanewton.com/making-the-most-of-covid-19-school-closures/>), a pediatric neuropsychology practice and integrative treatment center located throughout the northeastern United States. NESCA is referenced by the National Center for Systemic Improvement and the New York State Education Department. The following strategies are designed to reduce anxiety and promote a positive home environment.

- **Maintain Routines** – Children respond positively to routines. Consider keeping regular bedtimes and morning routines. If necessary, a schedule for daily planning may help. This helps children feel calm, and have a sense of structure, comfort and familiarity with their day. As an example, keep lunch at the same time on a daily basis to mirror what the children are used to from their school schedule.
- **Maintain Communication with Classroom Teachers** – At this point, students and parents are accustomed to checking the teacher websites, following up on classwork, and communicating with the classroom teacher. Effective this week, teachers, social workers, psychologists, and special education service providers, in addition to classroom/subject teachers, created standing appointments to call students at home. Please be sure to check your vmail and email for the appointment times. Related service providers regularly engage students in telepractice as specified in each IEP. Also, make sure to keep passwords to online learning sites used at school (iReady, IXL.com, ThinkCentral, MyON, etc.) in a convenient location and have the websites written down near the computer or bookmarked in the computer browser. If possible, have access to books at both easy reading and instructional reading levels and make them accessible to your child by keeping them in a specific location such as a bookshelf or near a designated quiet space for reading. If books are digital, they can be bookmarked within the website or on the device used to read them. Teachers typically have such information listed as additional resources or enrichment on their webpages. Also, if questions arise regarding the classwork, do not hesitate to send an email with “Virtual Hand Raise” in the subject line to the teacher. In addition, teacher schedules at this time include designated periods between 8:00 AM and 3:00 PM that are defined as Assistive Teaching (for them to respond to you via emails and phone calls); Google Meet sessions with and Sunshine Calls to students are also included.
- **Recess/Downtime** – Again, routines are helpful and important. Even though home is thought to be a place of relaxation and fun, we are in the midst of obvious challenges. Scheduling recess or play/downtime may help kids to feel like there is more of a routine. An average day at elementary schools fluctuates between time spent on learning, reflection, and physical movement. With an extended stay at home, it may help to address these needs. Children need an opportunity to move their bodies and

decompress. If outside, you may find it useful to ride bikes, walk, or take out the scooters. Of course, we must be mindful of safety practices such as wearing masks and practicing social distancing, and handwashing after the activity. (These are good habits to develop now as students will be practicing these same ones when we return to school.)

- **Use Screens Wisely** – Without a doubt, many of us are working from home and have significant to-do lists with added stress. At home, watching movies and favorite TV shows may inevitably be something we all do. You may want to include some more educational screen-based options as part of your child’s day. Resources such as National Geographic Kids, PBS KIDS.org, ScienceDaily.com, educationworld.com, TIME For Kids, Smithsonian Tween Tribune. These are only some examples that provide more academic content, including Social Studies, Science, Current Events and more. Commonsensemedia.org is also a great resource for finding age appropriate options.
- **Move Your Body** – While at home, there are some creative ways to make sure our kids get in time for gross motor movement. Consider options such as GoNoodle.com, Cosmickids.com, and Gaia.com for whole body movement and yoga videos. If you are looking for options other than video-based activities, consider building a pillow fort, keeping balloons from touching the ground, dance activities or setting up a home-made obstacle course.
- **Encourage Life Skills** – Though it may seem hard to fit in, when possible, consider spending this time teaching some skills in the home such as helping with the laundry, working through a recipe for dinner together, setting the dinner table, setting up for a backyard family picnic, or cleaning and organizing. All of these experiences help a child develop independent skills needed later on in life.
- **Reinforce Executive Functioning Skills** – This includes skills such as problem solving, time management, goal setting and organization. Provide sorting activities, have a child create their own schedule, set a daily goal, practice telling time or play some problem-solving games such as Heads-up, Charades or Guess Who. Such activities promote the development of positive and productive habits and ultimately contribute to stress reduction and lowering anxiety.

It is my sincere hope that you find the above information useful. We look forward to continued communication and collaboration among parents, teachers, and support staff members. If you are in need of assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to the school’s social worker, guidance counselor, or school psychologist. Please stay updated with important announcements on the District website and instructional assignments through the teacher webpages. As always, I may be contacted at 516-434-2620. I will return your call. Thank you, and take care during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Jacob Russum

Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Island Park UFSD