



THREE BIG QUESTIONS ON COPING WITH LOSS ANSWERED

Often times in our culture, we don't validate our micro-losses, or significant losses of routines, familiar places, workplace or classroom friends, and milestone celebrations. Dr. Maria Teahan offers some guidance in how to deal with the innumerable losses that are affecting us all.



About Dr. Maria Teahan: Dr. Teahan joined Barry University in 2006. In 2008, she was hired as the School of Social Work's MSW Program Director, and has now assumed the role of Associate Dean. As an educator, her philosophy is engrained in a trauma-informed, strengths and resiliency perspective with focus on integrity, service, social justice and advocacy. Prior to joining Barry University School of Social Work, Dr. Teahan served as Bereavement Manager and then as the Director of Supportive Care for a hospice for 10 years. She has more than 40 years of extensive practice experience in child and family, health care disparities, grief and traumatic loss and critical incident response.

Q: How do you start the conversation with your child about loss?

Teahan: Developmentally, children are in a space that is about having social interaction. That "give and take" is how they build competency as adults with social interaction. The interaction has been disrupted, and they have to reconnect through a modality within an environment that is not optimal – the internet. This paradox of how we are helping our kids is part of the disconnect of what we are feeling.

If parents want to respond in an optimal way, then I'd suggest it be in the most honest and transparent way, such as sharing, 'I'm scared too. I'm not sure what to do or how to do it.' The kids need to feel they are in a safe environment. Children are not expecting perfection. They are expecting transparency in communication.

As they deal with their stress, younger children may regress with their behaviors. Older children may be cocooning away from the family, which is natural for teenagers. Don't be afraid to bring that stress or emotion forward to talk about loss. Having the capability to say, 'I'm not sure what I'm doing, I'm scared too. But as a family, we are going to find a way to make this as normal as possible' is key to being heard.

Keeping a schedule/routine is critical for children. The most productive coping mechanisms during COVID-19 include setting up boundaries and a structure within the home – schoolwork is done during this time; I'm working during this time; family time is during this time. When we are keeping our normal routine, it equates control when most of us feel like we're not in control of anything.

I recommend that families do what is comfortable for them, not following parameters that are set by other people. Set up a realistic environment, so all of the family members can blossom. I've seen incredible resiliency during times of crisis.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS ON COPING WITH LOSS ANSWERED CONTINUED

Q: To exhausted parents, what is the advice?

Teahan: There is no easy answer to this. What they're really asking, is "how do you make the pain go away?" The answer is "you can't." There are no tips or techniques to take the pain away. This is the irony of healing – the only way to move through this is to move through this. Grief is not something that just goes away.

We can't make the COVID-19 pain go away, and anything that you read about coping with grief or coping with COVID-19 demands energy. If I'm already exhausted, how do I find the energy to do all the things that are supposed to help me? Journaling, exercising, advice on self-care – a slew of resources are available about making it through the pandemic – but it doesn't make it easier for people to build these mechanisms into their lives.

Validate where you are. We, as a culture, are not comfortable with negative feelings. Anger during this time is valid. Stress is defined when something we care about is at stake – damaged, lost or taken away from us. Our way of life has been utterly disrupted, and things are being taken away that meant something to us. Acknowledging our exhaustion and disillusionment and normalizing those feelings are very important. Trust yourself.



Q: What are some of the ways you are helping your clients?

Teahan: The reason people are saying they don't know how they're feeling isn't an absence of emotion – it's a flooding of emotion, and people are having difficulty responding to it. I'm helping my clients identify what they are feeling – anger, helplessness, anxiety. Once you've acknowledged, validated, and normalized your feelings, how do you express it in the best way without hurting yourself or anyone else? What can you do to regain a little bit of control, realizing what is and what is not within your sphere of control?

When people are overwhelmed, they can't always see what they can control. As a parent, what can you do now for yourself and your family? Try to set limits on what you can and cannot do, and learn to let go of what you cannot do. Try to do the next best thing, instead of the best-best thing.

Also, schedule time for your own self-reflection and grief. Parents, especially those who are in a grief journey, need to schedule time for themselves. It's not selfish to give yourself time because it refuels you. Moving your body during times of stress is really important, and learning to breathe. Trauma research shows that the brain is intrinsic in trauma response, and the best way to renegotiate the response is through breathing. Breathe in four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, in a cyclical pattern. When nothing else is available, we all can take time to breathe.

THROUGH CORONAVIRUS TO COLLEGE: *Supporting Students' Transition to Higher Education During Unprecedented Times*

Like becoming a teenager, learning how to drive or landing your first job, graduating high school and moving on to college is one of life's rites of passage. High school students respond to this in different ways. Many experience emotional swings from exhilaration and excitement to extreme anxiety and apprehension. All these responses have been amplified by the coronavirus pandemic, with students wondering if this pathway to adulthood will materialize for them in the way they expected. Fortunately, Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) offers support in this area, ensuring that resources—both practical and emotional—are available to students.

Seventy-seven percent of BCPS students graduate ready to attend a four-year institution, although a segment of those have other plans in mind such as internships, vocational training, or military service. College considerations begin long before graduation. BCPS provides help to juniors and seniors, including administrative assistance in obtaining transcripts, researching potential colleges, and identifying financial aid opportunities. Other supports are more focused on the mental health aspect of this period of change.



Normal College Anxiety and Beyond

Carol Lopez, supervisor of the College Career Readiness Program, acknowledges that students have many questions about the changes between high school and college. Many wonder if they are ready to leave home, how hard college work will be, how they will get along with their new roommates, and whether they might struggle, due to being separated from their parents (often for the first time). Last year, the program created a pamphlet for Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) students transitioning to college. It covered issues of fear, loneliness, readiness to leave home, recognizing possible depression, working with different types of students, and getting along with new people.

"We listen for themes," said Lopez. "And we develop material that responds to our students' real needs. Information is only useful if it's relevant, so we try to stay in tune with what our students are voicing."

This year, all those questions are being complicated by a pandemic.

Constraints Caused by COVID-19

Some of the issues emerging in the wake of COVID-19 are logistical. Students who are a few points away from their desired goal in the SAT/ACT tests are waiting to retake the test this summer, in the hope of obtaining a Bright Future scholarship, which can cover up to 75 percent or more of college costs. Now, it's uncertain if those tests will take place. Other issues are based in mental health, with young people confronting feelings of loss, despair, and a sense of having been cheated out of landmark events, like proms and graduation ceremonies.

THROUGH CORONAVIRUS TO COLLEGE CONTINUED

Lopez acknowledges that resilience is going to be more important than ever before for young people's success. Students who see the current circumstances as temporary tend to fare better than those who feel overwhelmed by current losses. Expecting young people to employ the wisdom of experience and maturity is a big ask, but they can be encouraged to look beyond the present. As Lopez explains, "you can acknowledge that yes, things are different right now, but focus on the positive. Life will start resembling normalcy again in the coming year or so."

Supports in Place for Those who Need Them

For those who need a little extra help, BCPS employs Continuing Education Advisors through its BRACE (Broward Advisors for Continuing Education) program. At MSD, Ana Farrand is always available to answer questions from facilitating college credit checks to entrance criteria advice. She encourages her students to take full advantage of the Naviance System, where students can apply for colleges, look for scholarships, and check their college-readiness skills. Farrand has also been celebrating Decision Month, showcasing students who have decided where they're heading after high school, whether it's to college, the military, or into the workplace.



This year's valedictorian, Julia Suconic, and her family celebrate her success, despite facing uncertainty and anxiety. COVID-19 is changing college plans, but resilience and adaptability will see BCPS students through.

well! Farrand believes their resilience is partly due to having already survived a tragedy together. She is very connected to her students and speaks with them and their families often. She offers webinars and works one-on-one with juniors and seniors to ensure they understand that colleges are working to find solutions and that they will have the student experience they have envisioned.

The Difficulty of Uncertainty

For now, simply sitting with the discomfort of not knowing may be the hardest part. Most colleges are developing new plans for teaching in-person, while implementing physical distancing procedures. Since these plans aren't standard across-the-board, or even finalized, students must determine if they intend to continue with their college careers as planned. Most out-of-state students are going ahead with their intentions to move to their college campuses, but many Florida-focused students are reconsidering. Some are choosing to take classes at community colleges before transitioning to a state college – an affordable, practical plan, if the majority of classes are being held virtually.

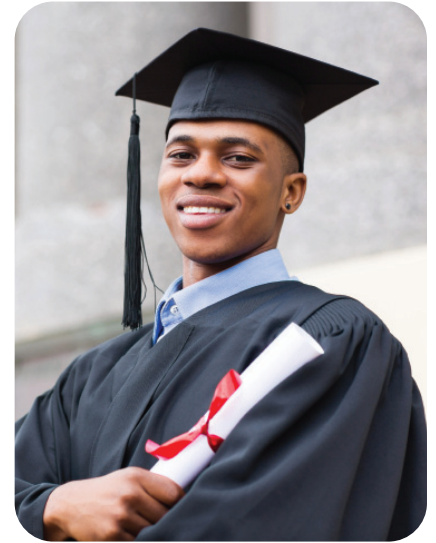
The Good News

Farrand has some good news about the experiences of MSD seniors during this tumultuous time: they're doing extremely

THROUGH CORONAVIRUS TO COLLEGE CONTINUED

"Their resilience constantly amazes me," Farrand said. "Yes, some feel as if this is one more knock-back they're having to endure, and that's hard. But mostly I'm hearing that they've got this. They have the resiliency of youth. If anything, their parents seem more anxious, so I talk to them a lot, too."

Farrand keeps giving her students messages of reassurance and encourages parents to do the same. Students can and will adapt as college requirements and plans change. Most importantly, the resources are there. "I am just a phone call away," said Farrand. "And if I don't have the answer, I will find a way to connect you to someone who does." She believes that college will continue to bring young people independence, challenges, and growth. The excitement may be postponed, or a little different, but it's still there, waiting to welcome BCPS students to their next phase of life.



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The following resources are made available to the community for free by a third-party. The content was not produced by Broward County Public Schools, but it may be of interest to you.

Eagle's Haven has been established, by generous funding from the Children's Services Council of Broward County, the United Way of Broward County and is powered by JAFCO, a local nonprofit, who has supported families in the South Florida community for the past 25 years. This safe nonprofit space is staffed with counselors and support staff. All Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students are welcome to visit and share. The organization offers yoga and even art classes (virtually for now) and is a safe place to meet and socialize. More information is available at eagleshaven.org.

Through Eagle's Haven, BRACE Continuing Education Advisor for MSD, Ana Farrand, will be offering a series of free 3-hour intensive information sessions for college-bound students (juniors and seniors) at the Parkland Library starting in June.

Students at MSD can always connect with School Counselor Jerry Turmaine, if they are feeling anxiety or need any mental health support services. At MSD, the Wellness Center also has support staff who are waiting to help students; they are available via phone or Zoom conference. Visit eagleshaven.org for more information.

Children's Bereavement Center operates 10 centers across South Florida, including in Davie, Parkland and Coral Springs. Their offices are currently closed, however they provide FREE virtual grief support groups online. Visit their website at childbereavement.org/support-groups/virtual-support.html for more information. Virtual support groups are available for:

- Elementary School Children
- Middle School Youth
- High School Teens
- Adults (English)
- Adults (Spanish)

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES CONTINUED

Since 1999, **Center for Child Counseling** has been building the foundation for playful, healthful, and hopeful living for children and families in Palm Beach County. Our services focus on preventing and healing the effects of adverse experiences and toxic stress on children, promoting resiliency and healthy family, school, and community relationships. Center for Child Counseling is offering free online training for parents on relevant topics:

How to Help My Child Listen: Parenting can be challenging at times. At one point or another, all parents experience defiance regardless of their child's age. If you are trying to teach your child to follow directions, this online workshop is for you.

In this online workshop, you will learn about:

- The importance of the relationship
- Encouragement vs praise
- Reflective Listening
- The ACT Model (an effective way of addressing challenging behaviors)
- Choices

This workshop is free, but you need to register before taking the class at your convenience. This workshop is offered in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. You can register by visiting events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07eh0al3tn1c8da5f8&llr=gh8ueflab.

Structuring My Child's Day for Success: Routine brings comfort and consistency to a child's life. If you are trying to set a routine at home, join us in this online workshop. This free parenting workshop is available in three languages.

In this online workshop, you will learn about:

- The importance of play
- Routine and structure
- The Importance of routine
- How to set a routine
- Flexibility and choices



This workshop is free, but you need to register before taking the class at your convenience. This workshop is offered in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. You can register by visiting events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07eh0amongd96950b1&llr=gh8ueflab.

browardschools.com/recovery



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