**HAND OUT ON: STRESS / TRAUMA / ANXIETY: compiled by Julie Cromhout Educational Psychologist BCM**

**You as teachers are the role models for resilience behaviours in the mentees. We wish to thank you in advance for all the work you are doing and to offer our support during this time. Care for yourselves so that you can care for others. There will be a ‘new way of doing things” The children need to be told this up-front and to understand exactly what that means in terms of health and safety and looking after themselves in these strange times.** As mentors, you may be the first responders in some cases:

**When talking: BE : Kind, Patient, Present** for all you deal with in your work. It is important to help “normalise” children’s experiences – saying, for example: “*that is quite natural under the circumstances*” and also to acknowledge “*that must have been hard for you*” – to enable the young person to feel heard.

Some ideas to help you help others – with covid hints but also can be used with most situations:

* Physical comfort and a sense of safety with gentle but firm boundaries, is to be encouraged.
* Preventative approaches such as relaxation breaks, listening to music, children knowing and trusting that the adults and mentors are in control in a protective way.
* We can also put a positive focus on covid- 19 news by amplifying positive/hopeful/ ‘future after covid’ thinking and stories – the aim is to promote resilience and encourage faith in a future.
* Encourage young people to limit their exposure to the news and rumours – especially on social media.

“COVID 19 SPEAK”: The World Health Organisation recommends that we refer to people affected by the virus as:

THOSE suffering = *“people who have Covid 19”; “people being treated for…”; People recovering…”*

**People affected have done NOTHING wrong and deserve support, compassion and kindness**

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR ERADICATING STIGMA

**WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE YOUNG PEOPLE YOU SERVE:**

* Take note of persistent and unexpected changes in behaviour that may signify difficulties.
* One person’s reaction to trauma can differ from that of others. Some people may have many experiences that collectively heighten a person’s reaction to stress, trauma, shock : the brain, being an historical organ will react in the fight mode for some (behaviour, reactive cheekiness etc) or flight: withdrawal, regression, refusals to follow instructions (especially our children who have special needs or have challenges)

STRESS CAN SHOW in the following ways :

* **Learning problems, physical complaints or in behaviour.**
* Poor memory
* Easily get frights, school refusal or reluctance to come back to school
* Hyper-aware – very alert to the surroundings; heightened visual or sensory reactions.
* Physical complaints such as sore neck, sore back, headache, tummy-ache, chest pain, rapid heart rate, bed-wetting
* A small challenge may trigger stress e.g. tests, peer rejection. The reaction may vary from the child being clingy, angry, agitated and fidgety, extra-demanding, or different to normal behaviour
* Sudden perfectionism – trying to regain control by insisting on doing everything perfectly
* Tone of voice, over-reactions, eye contact, new posture
* If anyone complains about dreams or poor sleep
* Numbing ie: no visible emotional reaction or responses; appearance of being disorientated
* Unreal sense of time and person – as if living in an alternate world/reality

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**Some examples of things that place people at risk during Covid 19:**

* loss of social contact, loss of normal liberties and personal freedoms (visiting or playing with friends)
* losses such as sporting goals or other milestones to which they have been working during their school career.
* Witnessing violence such as gender –based violence
* Fear of losing someone close
* Child protection issues and other personal safety risks such as physical, verbal or sexual abuse

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR HELPING PEOPLE AT RISK:

Some ideas and guiding principles from us as Psychologists:

* Before class starts, or in small groups help them to relax and settle – perhaps some may need to jump, swing their arms, stretch; deep breathing, tensing and releasing muscles.
* Incorporate opportunities for deep pressure as this is calming to the nervous system. You won’t be able to offer comforting hugs, but you can teach the learners to hug themselves. A minimum of 3 self-hugs, provide the deep pressure that can help anxiety. Other strategies for delivering deep pressure include chair push-ups, wall push-ups, chewing on gum/biltong/dried fruit, a shoe lace. Relaxation songs or music.
* Address the questions asked The hope is to be honest and to minimise anxiety. Give facts form DOE website or from WHO website.
* A spray bottle can be used as a concrete demonstration of the aerosol effect of the virus - how it hangs around in the air and that is why a mask is necessary. Use food colouring in the water to show the spray effect.
* Encourage self-expression:– creativity, art, words such as poems or a diary.
* Ask the children to ‘externalise ‘ what they think the virus to looks like.

EXAMPLES OF REACTIONS TO STRESS:

* Some reactions to Trauma/shock/stress/the unexpected may show in different ways:
* Poor memory – even for instructions
* Easily get frights, school refusal
* Hyper-aware – very alert to the surroundings; heightened visual or sensory reactions.
* Physical complaints such as sore neck, sore back, headache, tummy-ache, chest pain, rapid heart rate, bed-wetting
* A small challenge may trigger stress e.g. tests, peer rejection. The reaction may vary from the child being clingy, angry, agitated and fidgety, extra-demanding
* Anxious thoughts may be expressed by “WHAT IF” questions from children e.g. “what if my Mom dies of covid?” You can reply :“ *Sometimes anxious thoughts are not helpful to us…”*

WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO: encourage youth to think of 2-3 people they can talk to.

**Refer**: if you are worried or become aware of continued mood, physical complaints or hints/talk of being hopeless, or whispers of substance abuse then you need to refer the person to a professional, the clinic or doctor

**Departmental app.: sikuncede njani can** be downloaded and the person can navigate via “report an issue” to TELEHEALTH to connect with a Psychologist. “TOGETHER we are stronger”

This document has been compiled with reference to APA guidelines on resilience, WHO internet site on Covid-19; You Tube videos regarding Trauma; Kaplan &Sadock “Synopsis of Psychiatry”; Alan Carr “Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology” , amongst others.