Addressing the Adverse Impacts of COVID-19 on Children with Serious Emotional Disorders

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Location of presentation

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
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Participants will...

- Understand the impact of distance learning on academic outcomes especially for students with pre-existing emotional disorders
- Explain the social-emotional impacts of distance learning especially for students with pre-existing emotional disorders
- Describe two trauma-informed, resilience-oriented strategies to address the impacts especially for students with pre-existing emotional disorders
What do we know?

General Data on Education & Learning During COVID-19

92% of children reported that their school was closed.

Perceptions of learning

- Only 8% of children felt that they were learning as much as they were at school.
- More than 8 in 10 children felt that they were learning little or nothing at all.

Returning to school

- 94% of parents/caregivers and 95% of children believe their child/they will return to school after the pandemic.

Obstacles to learning & access to learning resources

- 4 in 5 children reported obstacles to learning during school closures.
  - 37% No one to help.
  - 27% Not understanding homework.
  - 20% Not enough data to access the internet.
  - 15% Too many chores to do.

- 1 in 4 children did not have access to any learning materials at home.
- 1 in 4 parents/caregivers reported that they could not support their child's learning at all.

- 67% of parents/caregivers reported that their children had no contact with their teachers at all.

Children's wellbeing during school closures

- More children who were not going to school (81%) or whose schools were closed (84%) reported an increase in negative feelings, compared to just over half (56%) who are going to school in person.

Children use the following learning materials at home:

- 68% Textbook.
- 42% Reading books.
- 18% TV programs.
- 14% Activity sheets.
- 8% Internet.
- 7% Phone apps.
- 5% Radio programs.
- 2% Computer programs.
- 13% None of these.

Early childhood care and development

Parents/caregivers reported positive activities done together with the child:

- 42% Telling stories to the child.
- 21% Reading a book together.
- 12% Singing/dancing/musical activities.
- 10% Drawing/doing arts and craft.

14% of parents/caregivers did not report engaging in any activity with their child during the COVID-19 period.
2020-21 School Year Enrollment Data

What do we know?

https://covidschooldashboard.com

- 5,181 Schools
- 4,028,141 In Person Students
- 1,346,331 In Person Staff

Learning Model:
- Remote or online learning only
- Reduced capacity in-person or hybrid with ...
- Full capacity in-person
What do we know?

No direct comparisons to past events or trends.

- Online learning and teaching is only effective if students have consistent access and teachers have targeted training.
- Home schooling works for students who have intentional, personalized and sufficient resources.
- Reduced learning time has likely impeded student learning and development.
- Chronic absenteeism requires appropriate support to children who are least prepared.
- Pandemic exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps.
- **Disagreement about how to determine individual student needs.**

**Source:** EPI analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress microdata, 2015. Chart adapted from Figure A in García and Weiss 2018.
Impact on Students with Significant Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Learning Losses because....

• For many physical distancing increases support, anxiety and learning.
• Reduction in individually designed Special Education Services
• Delays in assessing students to determine their level of need or program qualifications—delaying implementation of services
• Specialized instruction is less tailoring to individual student need.
• Inaccessibility to virtual learning
  ➢ Lack of WIFI
  ➢ Lack of Equipment
  ➢ Lack of skills to effectively use the virtual setting.
  ➢ Accommodations are unsuccessful.
• Lack of support in the home.
Challenges Lead to Increased Disengagement

- Most standardized testing waived during 2019-2020 school year.
- Unsure about use this year.
- Chronic absenteeism in virtual learning settings.
- Decreased instructional time due to social distancing.

**Source:** EPI analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress microdata, 2015. Chart adapted from Figure A in García and Weiss 2018.
Addressing the Challenges at all Levels
Macro-Level Factors: Policy & Environment
Strategies at the Macro Level

- Provide opportunities and resources to process COVID information
- Provide resources to support caregivers
- Increase accessibility to evidence-based mental and physical health.
- Maintain connection to peers & create supportive environments
- Decrease stigma related to having COVID-19
- Decrease racial stigma related to COVID-19
- Increase focus on most vulnerable communities.
Meso-Level Factors: Systems and Structures
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Q: Are we ensuring that accessibility is guaranteed to the procurement of materials and technologies enabling students with disabilities to access curricula with assistive technology?</th>
<th>Responsibility of:</th>
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<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Q: Do we have personnel and guidelines in place to ensure that students’ IEPs and 504 plans are appropriately reviewed, revised, and updated in partnership with parents &amp; guardians as scheduled during the year?</td>
<td>School-level administrators &amp; teachers,</td>
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<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Q: Are our general education, special education, assistive tech. and educ. Tech staff prepared to collaborate to ensure that every learner with a disability continues to learn and make progress in the least restrict environment?</td>
<td>State, district &amp; school policymakers &amp; administrators</td>
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<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Q: How are data being collected to determine if the outcomes for students with IEPs an 504 plans are proportionate to those without?</td>
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**Must Haves to Ensure Free & Appropriate Education**

**Access Q**: Are we ensuring that accessibility is guaranteed to the procurement of materials and technologies enabling students with disabilities to access curricula with assistive technology?

**Responsibility of**: School-level administrators & teachers,

**Capacity Q**: Do we have personnel and guidelines in place to ensure that students’ IEPs and 504 plans are appropriately reviewed, revised, and updated in partnership with parents & guardians as scheduled during the year?

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**Outcome Q**: How are data being collected to determine if the outcomes for students with IEPs an 504 plans are proportionate to those without?
Meso-Level Responses

Telehealth in Schools and Communities

59% of youth and 62% of families rated telehealth as more effective than in-person services.

Micro-Level – Quarantine...Social Isolation...

- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Family Losses and Separations
- Sleep Disturbances
- Exposure to Unhealthy Coping Behaviors and Environments
- Homeless Children
Micro-Level Responses

- Build supportive environments for youth
- Involve all stakeholders—mental health experts, school personnel, parents, students, medical personnel.
- Provide opportunities to express their emotions
- Help youth remain connected in safe ways.
## Impact of Trauma & Toxic Stress – Daily Challenges for Students with Significant Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Performance</th>
<th>Social Emotional Development</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Low Academic Performance</td>
<td>• Poor control of emotions-dysregulation</td>
<td>• Intense reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decrease in reading ability</td>
<td>• Negatively impact peer relationships</td>
<td>• Impulsive behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher rate of absenteeism</td>
<td>• Alters way of responding to social cues</td>
<td>• Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More suspensions</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Shutting down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased drop out</td>
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Additional Challenges for Students with Significant Disabilities

**Typical Challenges:**
- Difficulty with uncertainty
- Following instructions
- Understanding the complexity of situations such as the pandemic.
- Doing their work independently

**COVID-19 Related Challenges:**
- Separated for small group & one-on-one assistance
- Lack of positive role models for academic and behavioral skills.
- Decreased opportunity to learn social and emotional skills
- Decreased professional educational and mental health support
- Decrease or suspension of special services
- Heightened distress

**Results**
- Revert to negative behaviors
- Increased negative behaviors
- Increased conflict with parents.
- Increased anxiety & self harm
- Decreased ability to communicate.
Additional Social-Emotional Impacts of COVID-19

- Young Children -- Difficulty communicating with people outside of their family, increased anxiety and depression.
- Impact due to quarantine and separation from parents – Additional burden of being separate from a parent in isolation—**all trusted support gone.**
- School and College going students– Absence of structure found in the classroom.
- Impact on children and adolescents having special needs, especially serious emotional disorders – **No direct support and guidance for their work which increases frustration and acting out.**
- Underprivileged Children- WiFi less available—less communication , support and actual instruction.

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7444649/)
Began the 2020-21 School year with...
- 66% percent of typical learning gains in reading
- 44% of typical learning gains in math.

Decline will have been at vastly different rate based on individual student experiences with an increased impact on students with disabilities.

Achievement Gap will continue to widen based on the amount and quality of the support and engagement at home.

Special Education students in need of intensive support cannot receive that in the virtual environment. Many IEPs for students who need individual support have been suspended or just not met.
Ensure Safety in All Environment for Students with Emotional Disabilities

Physical School Setting

Virtual Education

Emotional
Physical
Social
Behavioral
Academic
Identity
Moral
Virtual Safe and Secure Environment
For Students with Significant Emotional Disabilities and Staff

Virtual Safe and Secure Environment Considerations

- Adjustment
- Flexibility
- Legal and Ethical
- Appropriateness
- Technical Competence
- Student Privacy
- Teacher Competence
- Teacher Privacy
- Student Confidentiality
- Crisis Plan
- Workforce Training/Meeting
- Staff Debriefing

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Cultural Safety—Practice this Virtually

Cultural Safety 5 Principles

- Protocols
  - Show respect – Ask permission/informed consent
  - Seek cultural knowledge – Ask questions
  - Demonstrate reciprocity – Learning goes both ways
  - Engage community accommodation –
    - Find allies, mentors in community of practice

- Personal knowledge
  - Hone critical consciousness of social location/power
  - Who are you? Cultural affiliations, professional persona
  - Introduce yourself in terms of your cultural identities

- Partnerships
  - Engage in relational practice founded on authentic encounters
  - Share knowledge vs. “telling”
  - Collaborative problem solving vs. expert/authority
  - Strengthen mutual capacity vs. one-way “delivery”
  - Co-construct ways to move supports into place

- Process
  - Ensure equity and dignity for all parties
  - Negotiate goals and activities
  - Talk less, listen more

- Positive purpose
  - Build on strengths
  - Avoid negative labelling
  - Ensure confidentiality
  - Be accountable
  - Do no harm
  - Make it matter: Ensure real benefits

http://www.ecdip.org/culturalsafety/
Teacher teams determine what is **essential** based on standards and benchmarks, plans such as IEPs and current individual capacity:

- **Flash Back**: Where were the priorities during closure virtual learning? *What does the data say about this student’s performance?*

- **Flash Forward**: What are we most concerned about?
  - Embed skills in need of remediation in instruction: phonics in reading comprehension, three branches of government, the scientific method, common denominators into whatever is being covered at the time.
Addressing Emotional Difficulties During Learning

- Prioritize coping and calming skills- Use deep breathing throughout the day.
- Maintain routines and build new routines.
- Personalized check-ins: verbal, written, visual and audio
  (Face Time, Marco Polo, Video Chat Apps, Direct Messaging)
- Remain in close touch with parents/guardians.
- Encourage communication
  use social stories & comic strip conversations
- Teach Social and Emotional Skills in Online Sessions &
  Support during activities such as chess or other online learning games.
- Break learning into small chunks to support understanding
Incorporate Trauma-Informed Resilience-Oriented Practices into On Line Work for Students with Emotional Disabilities

- Control of Self
- Sense of Humor
- Self Belief
- Emotional Awareness
- Social Support
- Optimism
- Ability to Solve Problem

Resilience
Mental Health Recommendations

Young Children:

- **Parents:** Healthy parents, engaging in interactive play activities, practicing mental health hygiene, maintain consistent routine, promoting health behavior.

- **Pediatricians:** Screening of vulnerable children, educating parents about developmental needs of children, managing mild stress and anxiety in children, managing mild stress and anxiety in children, referring to health care professionals.

- **Teachers/ School Counselors:** Educating about COVID-19, mental health promotion, coordinating with parents, referring to mental health care professionals.

- **Mental Health Care Workers:** Providing psychoeducation by tele-counseling, orienting brief diagnostic and psychological assessment tools to pediatricians.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7444649/
Summary of Mental Health Recommendations

School going children and adolescents

- **Teachers/School Counselors:** Life skills training, Educating about COVID-10, promoting mental health, referring to mental health care professions.
- **Parents:** Practicing healthy communication, mental health hygiene, being positive role models, practicing adaptive coping.
- **Peer Group:** Providing supportive role, problem solving
- **Online Support Systems:** Providing supportive role, referring to mental health care professionals.
- **Mental Healthcare Workers:** Tele-counseling, providing online orientation for teachers, creating material for school teachers and school counselors, related to mental health promotion, life skill training.
Summary of Mental Health Recommendations

Children with Special Needs, specifically students with significant emotional challenges:

- **Parents**: Participating in management of behavior problems, maintaining consistent routine, promoting healthy behavior.
- **Schools**: Educating about COVID-19, mental health promotion, referring to mental health care professionals.
- **Community volunteers**: Provide psychological first aid, coordinate with caregivers, refer to mental health care professionals.
- **Mental Healthcare Workers**: Tele-counseling and consultation, provide parent focused interventions and mental-wellbeing interventions, weighing risks of medications.
Summary of Mental Health Recommendations

Underprivileged/vulnerable children

- **Parents:** Healthy parenting, being supportive, problem solving
- **Community Volunteers:** Providing psychological first aid, financial empowerment if possible, coordinating with care givers and mental health care professionals
- **NGOs:** Identify high risk children, providing psychological first aid, coordinating with care givers and mental health care professionals.
- **Police:** Providing psychological first aid, referring to mental health care professionals.
- **Mental Healthcare Workers:** Creating material for community volunteers and NGSs for identifying high risk children.
Summary of Mental Health Recommendations

Quarantined parents/children

- **Parents**: If child is separated – keep contact as much as possible, being supportive and reassuring.
- **Community Volunteers**: Coordinating with care givers, referring to mental health care professionals.
- **Foster Care Givers**: Being supportive, reassuring and educating.
- **Mental Healthcare Workers**: Constructing and coordinating online questionnaire in order to detect psychological distress and other symptoms for children, providing additional support and interventions in the quarantined environment.
Colorado Department of Education. *Remote Learning Resources for SEL, Mental Health and Behavior.* [https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/selremotelearningresources](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/selremotelearningresources)

Council for Exceptional Children & eLuma online therapy. *Best Practices for Educating Online.* [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xu2bRgZvfQwwQOoXWSx8B00WP7wQLQO3/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xu2bRgZvfQwwQOoXWSx8B00WP7wQLQO3/view)

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Questions & Discussion
Thank You!