

Providing Emotional Support for Students amid the Epidemic

Facing the continued occurrence of COVID-19 in Hong Kong and the influence arising from the epidemic, some students may display negative emotions and stress. We suggest that teachers should make reference to the following methods when helping students cope with their emotions and gradually adjust to school life.

Understanding and coping with stress reactions

- Teachers can teach students that the following stress reactions are common when people face a series of changes in the environment. With appropriate care and support, these reactions will gradually diminish in most people.

Physical aspect	Cognitive aspect
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Somatic complaints– Fatigue– Insomnia or excessive sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Impaired concentration– Reduced decision-making ability or memory loss– Negative thoughts
Emotional aspect	Behavioural aspect
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Feeling unhappy– Getting annoyed easily and feeling irritable– Depressed mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Isolating from friends or activities– Behaving in an oppositional way– Refusing to go to school

- Teachers' care and love is very important to students. When students express their feelings, teachers can listen to them in a receptive and non-judgmental manner, and help them find ways to relax or regulate their emotions (e.g. talking with friends and doing deep breathing/ muscle relaxation exercise).
- Teachers should maintain communication with parents. Both can jointly observe, and pay attention to, the behaviour of students. As long as students' stress reactions do not seriously affect their daily life and mental and physical conditions, teachers and parents should allow them time to adapt and gradually return to their previous state.
- If students suffer from severe or persistent emotional distress (e.g. displaying excessive anxiety and fear), teachers should promptly refer them to the school social workers, school-based educational psychologists or other professionals for appropriate support.

Gradually adjust to school life

- A stable mood can help students learn effectively. As students' living and study routine is disturbed, they may be more relaxed in their mood and spirit than before, failing to concentrate in class, or consolidate their learning as instructed. Teachers should adjust the content and pace of teaching with reference to students' conditions and needs. Teachers should also give more tolerance, set appropriate expectations for their learning and performance and raise reasonable requirements to them accordingly.
- Maintaining social connectedness is an effective way for students to manage stress. Teachers may organise classroom activities to help students maintain communication with others and establish social support network.
- In addition, teachers should strengthen communication and cooperation with parents and help them understand that it takes time for their children to readjust their learning, behaviour and emotion. Parents could be reminded to raise reasonable requirements to their children with appropriate expectations and help them take up regular living habits and engage in school life again.

References

1. Psychoeducational videos – “Suspending Classes without Suspending Love in the Epidemic”
 - The videos explain to teachers and parents in simple language the possible emotional reactions of students and children in face of a series of stressful events, and introduce ways to foster mental well-being and help them stay positive when facing class resumption.
(https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsNQuY6XoSaDOgUtaiTr_kRjyOODo1J7u) (Chinese version only)
2. Handout on the Workshop “Love and Care in Schools Amid Social Changes”
 - The EDB organised 20 sessions of workshop titled “Love and Care in Schools Amid Social Changes” for teachers and guidance personnel. Psychiatrists were invited to share practical skills for supporting students in need and discuss case studies with a view to enhancing school personnel's capability in taking care of students with mental health needs.
(https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Professional%20Development/Workshop_on_Managing_Students_with_Mental_Health_Difficulties.pdf)

3. E-posters on promotion of “gate-keeping” and “help-seeking”

- The EDB issued the e-posters to arouse the attention of school staff and students to mental health and remind them to take the initiative to care for students in need.

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-poster%20on%20help-seeking.pdf>

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-poster%20on%20gate-keeping.pdf>) (Chinese version only)

4. E-posters on “Staying Mentally Strong during Examination Season”

- The EDB issued the e-posters to encourage secondary school students and their parents to cope with examination pressure with positive skills.

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-posters_for_students_Eng.pdf

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-posters_for_parents_Eng.pdf)

5. E-posters on “How to Face Examination Results Positively”

- The EDB issued the e-posters to encourage upper primary and secondary school students, as well as their parents, to face the examination results positively.

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-poster_exam_results_students_Eng_Feb_2021.pdf

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/teacher/prevention-of-student-suicides/Resource%20Packages%20and%20Guidelines/E-poster_exam_results_parents_Eng_Feb_2021.pdf)