May 19, 2020

To Our Catholic School Community,

With the announcement of school building closures for the remainder of the school year, administrators, teachers, parents and students now realize that what may have been temporary for a few weeks is now permanent through June.

Now, more than ever, as we continue to navigate our current situation, paying attention to mental health and wellness and staying connected is important. During stressful times, children and teens take their cues from the adults in their lives. How we respond to current events, manage our feelings, and take care of ourselves and those around us models for children how to respond.

There is no shortage of tips and suggestions about this topic. Below are some that I find to be most helpful

- Find healthy ways to manage your feelings, even if it's a few minutes alone each morning or evening to prepare for or review the day.

- As best as you can, try to keep to a routine, whatever that looks like for you and your family. Children need structure, and while it may look different than a school day, predictability provides comfort. It can also help when space and access to a computer is limited. Having a set time for where and when school and work get done can be helpful.

- Find ways to keep children occupied. Play games, do puzzles or step outside. Explore websites to zoos or museums; many are providing free access to "virtual trips." And do this with your child. Feeling connected to them and having fun is important for families.

- Provide reassurance about the current pandemic. Give information that is accurate and simple. Explain why hand washing and wearing a mask are ways to keep us healthy. It's okay to share your feelings but balance that with hope and how to cope. For example, instead of saying there is no cure for the virus, explain that scientists are working on this.

- Listen and don't minimize concerns of children. For example, it's not helpful to say to an 8th grader who is sad about missing graduation, that things could be worse. Children and teens are sad about many things, including not seeing friends, their favorite teacher or getting to celebrate milestones. These are important to them and allowing them to talk about these feelings is important.

- Limit exposure to the news, especially in front of children. Use it to get information. Too much news about this or any tragedy only creates anxiety.

- Find ways to help family, friends, or the community, even if it is calling, texting or writing notes. Giving children and teens the opportunity to *do something* gives them a sense of control and allows them to feel like they can make a difference.

- Stay connected to family and friends via phone, text, email, Zoom or and other similar platforms.

- Lastly, take advantage of the many resources available online. Many wonderful resources are posted on https://catholicschoolsny.org/covid-19/. They are updated regularly and provide information about education, remote learning, family activities, and mental health and wellness techniques.

As noted in a previous communication, ADAPP will be offering **brief mental health phone consultations** and support to parents who have concerns about their child(ren) and will refer them, as appropriate, to additional resources.

To participate in this program, please email MentalHealthsSupport@adapp.org, with the name of the school your child attends, their grade, and the city in which the school is located in the subject line. Please describe your concern so the counselor can be prepared to respond, and leave a phone number if you would like a call back. *Every attempt will be made to respond within 24 hours, Monday – Friday, during the hours of 8 am to 4 pm.* ****If you have a mental health emergency, please call 911****

In addition, we also know that there are other challenges that face our families, if you have questions about state and local benefit programs or other community resources, you can send an email to FamilySupport@adapp.org.

Sincerely yours,

Christine Cavallucci, LCSW, CPP
Executive Director