As we near the end of 2020, many of us feel mixed emotions about the events of the past nine months. If you and your family are feeling tired, overwhelmed, and saddened by all of the loss and challenges faced by people in our community and around the country, you are not alone. Never before have we seen such tremendous waves of adversity crash over us, and seemingly one after another. In a year full of adjustments, widespread challenges, and change, one thing remains true: we are in this together, Monroe! And we will continue to move, grow, and adapt to our changing world together.
Parents, You’ve Got This

When the pandemic started in March, no one could have imagined that so many of us would be working from home while trying to parent and teach simultaneously through the end of the school year. Nor could we foresee the situation we find ourselves in now, still teaching our children at home in November. If there is one thing I’ve learned over the last several months, it’s this: There is no perfect way to support remote learning during this crisis. And whatever you are doing that helps your child feel positive about learning, it’s just right.

Remember to be kind and take care of yourself. Now is not the time to expect more from ourselves or our children. It is time to have grace for ourselves. This remote-learning thing is hard and challenging. It is okay to feel whatever you’re feeling, and to take the time you need to feel and do things for yourself.

Have grace for your kids. If you notice that they are “done” for the day, it’s okay to tell them to take a break or come back to that assignment tomorrow. You know your child best. You can see how they are holding up emotionally. You are their best support and advocate. Sometimes simple reminders are all we need, such as the importance of routines and schedules which can help our days run more smoothly.

Try to build in flexibility for the days that don’t go as planned. Maybe your internet goes out, or Canvas is slow, or Zoom doesn’t work. These are things that are out of our control. But we do our best in those moments, and that is all we can do. Teachers and staff are here to partner with you to support your child emotionally and academically. If you have concerns, reach out to us so we can figure out what might be helpful. This is new to all of us, and we are all learning together.

Sometimes we just need to take a moment to breathe and remind ourselves that we got this, we’re all in this together, we are doing our best, and that is always enough.
Hey Kids! How's it Going?

We asked our students how they're coping with remote learning and social distancing this year. This is what they shared with us.

**How has remote learning been for you? What is going well? What has been a struggle?**

- It has been a little rough, but I've been handling it. Getting work done is easier. Zooms can be hard because there are usually a lot of people in the background, so it can be pretty delayed. (Arlo)
- The fact we are not live; learning in person sure is easier. Not being able to see my friends has also been hard, and not being able to enjoy this year as well is also pretty tough. (Luna)
- The work load is easy but I feel like I am not actually retaining or learning as much information as I would if we were learning in-person. (11th grade, MHS)
- Remote learning has been a struggle. I find that it's extremely difficult to focus and self motivate, I've never had this much trouble in school. (11th grade, MHS)
- Remote learning has been kind of crazy for me. Although we have a great canvas website and awesome zoom meetings, it has been a struggle not to be at school. (Caleb)
- It has been a bit hard for me since I can't go to the teachers. and remembering class times is hard. (Andrea)
- It is going well. I like online school. (10th grade, MHS)

**In general, what do you feel like you need from the adults at school?**

- More interactive assignments maybe? (11th grade, MHS)
- In my experience my teacher and principal have been great, they are always asking if we need help and always giving it when we ask for it, and they always make time for us. (Luna)
- I need my counselor for advising and talking, it’s hard learning online especially without the help of a counselor. (11th grade, MHS)
- I just wish I was at school. (Caleb)
- I am not quite sure what I need from teachers, they are already doing their best with the situation we have. (Andrea)
- I need more time. They assign homework every day but I don't have enough time to do it all. (10th grade, MHS)

**What do you need from your adults at home?**

- A little help with work. (Arlo)
- I need them to understand that school may not be super hard right now but it is frustrating and that makes it hard. We don't have the resources we used to and we can't see our friends. It is very draining. (11th grade, MHS)
- My parents have been very encouraging and supportive. (Luna)
- I need a better way to remember zoom times. (Andrea)
How is your life different today than it was 9 months ago?

It was easier before to do school in general. (Arlo)
I definitely feel like I am less social than I was and that I have lost some of my communication and social skills. (11th grade, MHS)
It has definitely been more stressful and worrying than it was 8 months ago. (Luna)
My life was more organized and structured. (11th grade, MHS)
Life is different today because now we can’t go very many places and can’t go to school, unlike before the pandemic. (Caleb)
I am not getting out much and I am having a lot less social interaction. (Andrea)
I am 4 hours away from my school but yet still in class. (10th grade, MHS)

As you reflect on the last 9 months of the pandemic, describe how you have seen yourself adapt and grow.

I learned to take breaks from screens. (Arlo)
I have gotten better physically because I started to workout more to pass time. I also feel like I have found more of who I am and who I want to be because I had a lot of time to myself during quarantine. (11th grade, MHS)
I have adapted to masks – it’s very common for me now. And online school, I know what to do to be able to do my best and succeed in classes more than I did when we begun. (Luna)
I’ve become more resilient but less chaotic. (11th grade, MHS)
I’ve grown because I am getting older, and also I have adapted to a virtual school. (Caleb)
I am learning to multi task. I am also learning to go to classes on time, which I am still working on. (Andrea)
I’ve gotten a lot less motivated to do school then I was 8 months ago. (10th grade, MHS)

How would you summarize your last 9 months in ONE WORD?

Rough! (Arlo)
Impactful (11th grade, MHS)
Difficult (Luna)
Stressful (11th grade, MHS)
Weird (Caleb)
Challenging (Andrea)
Unexpected (10th grade, MHS)

Thank you to our participants!

Arlo is in 4th grade at Maltby Elementary
Quinnlan is in 4th grade at Maltby Elementary
Caleb M. is in 6th grade at Hidden River Middle School
Luna is in 8th grade at Hidden River Middle School
Anonymous in 10th grade at Monroe High School
Anonymous (1) in 11th grade at Monroe High School
Anonymous (2) in 11th grade at Monroe High School
Andrea C. in 12th grade at Monroe High School

Click here to check out Quinnlan's interview!
Thank you for sharing with us, Quinnlan!
How to Win at Distance Learning

When it comes to distance learning, we’re all freshmen. But here are some things to remember when supporting our students (and ourselves!) during this time of asynchronous academics.

Conversations that start with empathy and an attempt to understand your child’s perspective can go a long way.

When was the last time you tried learning something new when you were feeling frustrated or anxious? It’s likely that you weren’t successful until you reduced your levels of frustration and distress. When an event causes us to feel frustrated, we have several options. We can find a way to avoid it, and hope the problem will go away, or we can work through coping with the stress.

What is it that makes our children willing to experience some frustration just long enough to step forward instead of stepping back? How can we help them feel the emotions most helpful to learning? Many of us have heard the importance of having a growth mindset. Yet telling someone to have a “growth mindset” can be counterproductive. Children may feel they are being manipulated and respond by doing the opposite and “digging in.” Modeling and encouraging the “language of learning,” on the other hand, can create a positive path forward.

What is the language of learning? Conversations that start with empathy and an attempt to understand your child’s perspective can go a long way. When we show genuine interest and empathy toward our children, we can help them feel more relaxed, confident, and positive. If they feel forced to enter a space that causes frustration, they might be “present” physically, but it’s likely their minds are elsewhere. Their brains may be hard at work, but they are not engaged in new learning.

So start small. Recognize what’s taking place each time your child works through frustration. Acknowledge it. Encourage them to express their feelings of frustration by expressing empathy so they can recognize their emotional state and accept it. When they do stick with a task, no matter what it is, recognize their fortitude, courage, and persistence. For many students, learning remotely is challenging. It’s hard. It’s lonely. So, any time they are able to engage in learning, it’s a win!
Have your children taken time to understand something, ANYTHING, that they didn’t understand before? Have they taken a short break during a time they were “supposed to be learning” because they realized their mind was elsewhere? Both of these behaviors are wins! They are showing persistence, self-awareness, and healthy coping strategies. Such behaviors build capacity in their brains to help them face frustrations and reinforce the belief that they are capable of facing their fears and dealing with their frustrations.

Although there are many challenges with distance learning, and there is nothing we want more than to have your children back in school with us in real time, asynchronous learning gives us an opportunity to help our children be in charge of their own learning and develop positive feelings about learning. Let’s celebrate instances when they show independence, curiosity, and follow through. Using the language of encouragement will not only help them navigate learning now, but will help prepare them to be lifelong learners in the future.
Mindful Parenting

Have you struggled to handle your child’s behavior since the start of COVID and this oh-so-stressful time of remote learning? I’m sure you have. All of us parents are struggling. We are all in this together.

As the district behavior analyst I often work with children who struggle with behavior. But I am also a parent and, I too, struggle with my own child’s behavior.

**Challenge:** Take a moment and think about a recent argument or power struggle that you’ve had with your child. Perhaps it was around schoolwork. Perhaps it was arguing over a rule you’ve tried to enforce a thousand times. **What was your instinct?** My instinct is to go into problem solving mode in which I stop my child from misbehaving. Simultaneously I experience an overwhelming urge to yell or worse – especially on the days in which energy and patience are lacking.

In fact, as a behavior analyst, I am specifically trained in behavior management strategies, many with the goal of reducing problem behavior. But guess what? It’s still feels impossible at times. **The problem is, sometimes the “problem” is our own behavior as parents.**

The real issue can stem from our own tendencies to react rather than respond to our children’s many colorful ways of misbehaving. What happens when they push our buttons? Do we calmly respond every single time? No! We get upset. Our feelings get hurt. We lose our cool. But we are also human. So, how can we respond effectively in the face of extreme emotions?

I want to introduce you to an alternative option - one that might seem counterintuitive. *I invite you to consider the idea of mindful parenting.*

**What does mindful parenting mean?** It means slowing down, being aware of your child (their needs, their mood, their behavior.) It also means being aware of your own needs, emotions, patterns of thinking, and behavior as well.
Practically speaking, mindful parenting means setting aside time to spend with your child, free from distractions, so that you can focus on parenting - right here, right now. It might mean putting away your phone. It might mean playing their favorite odd choice of music and listening to it with them. Or it might mean embracing a mess as you cook together.

Mindful parenting does not require you to be perfect. But it opens an opportunity for you to become more aware of your own state of mind. For example, perhaps you are feeling snippy toward your family. Check in with yourself: are you hungry? Are you tired? Perhaps you need to take a break.

Go a step further by communicating what you’re feeling with your family, as you become aware of how it might affect your behavior. For example, “Hey guys, I’m having the feeling that I am really tired right now. I’d appreciate a quick power nap. Can you set the table while I rest?”

More than anything, mindful parenting means having grace for yourself and your child. By slowing down you are able to respond, not react so you can choose the next best thing in line with your values as a parent. And perhaps that next best thing is walking away, a humble apology, or a simple heartfelt, “I love you.”

Written by: Gabbie Lanier, BCBA

For More Information on Mindfulness:

Books:
Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Myla Kabat-Zinn
Mindfulness in the classroom by Joshua C. Felver and colleagues

Blogs:
https://www.gottman.com/blog/mindful-parenting-how-to-respond-instead-of-react/

Podcasts:
www.zenparentingradio.com
Combating the Pandemic Blues

Call it pandemic fatigue, Coronavirus burnout, quarantine blues, or epic epidemic exhaustion - whatever you call it, it stinks! And we are all feeling it. All of the sweeping (and inescapable) changes to our lives have left many of us feeling frustrated, angry, sad, overwhelmed, and helpless.

With change comes stress, and with stress comes a number of other mental health challenges. For some people, this may look like anxiety, grief, or depression. Many of our kids are showing a tremendous amount of resiliency and fortitude, but it is important to be able to spot the warning signs that they may not be faring so well.

When watching for emotional ‘red flags,’ the key is to look for big changes in your child.
For example:

- Has their mood shifted dramatically?
- Are they more tearful, agitated, or grumpy than usual?
- Are you seeing changes in how they eat or sleep? Changes in appetite may include either a reduction or a marked increase in the amount of food they will eat, or if they are hiding or sneaking extra food.
- Notice if they seem more tired and worn out, or exhausted, than they typically do (pre-pandemic).
- Are they isolating from friends?
- Or maybe they have reduced interest or motivation to participate in their favorite activities.

It is important to trust your instincts, and consider that you know your child best! When you sense that something is ‘off,’ you are probably right.

Changes in your child do not necessarily mean that they are depressed.
It may indicate the natural, normal changes that come along with their developmental growth. Again, lots of our kids are being incredibly resilient throughout this pandemic’s adversity. However, if you are noticing three or more of these symptoms (especially for two weeks or more), or if any of these symptoms are interfering with your child’s ability to complete their schoolwork, or to accomplish their regular daily routine, do not hesitate to reach out for support!

During this time of social distancing and personal safety measures, it is particularly important to remember that it takes a village to raise happy, healthy children - and we are still a strong village, Monroe! If you are concerned about your child, or about the mental and emotional wellbeing of a loved one, please reach out to your doctor, school counselor, spiritual leader, or to Monroe School District’s Behavioral Health Team for help. We may be socially distanced, but we are all in this together!
Where to Go for Help

In these tough times, it is important to remember that you and your student(s) have a village behind you to provide all kinds of support. Let us know if you need help with anything, including academics, behavior struggles, social and emotional issues, or basic needs such as housing, finances, getting enough food, transportation, etc. Monroe School District has some of the best systems of support for our students and families in the whole state of Washington.

**Elementary School Counselors:**
- **Chain Lake Elementary**
  - Heather Mitchell (360-804-3100)
- **Frank Wagner Elementary**
  - Michelle Simeoni (360-804-3200)
- **Fryelands Elementary**
  - Austin Talbott (360-804-3400)
- **Maltby Elementary**
  - Gail Gronwall (360-804-3500)
- **Salem Woods Elementary**
  - Lynnette Ervin (360-804-3600)

**Middle School Counselors:**
- **Hidden River Middle School**
  - Lily Shafer (360-804-4100)
- **Park Place Middle School**
  - (360-804-4300)
  - Last names: A-H, ELL, Spanish-Speaking
  - Elsa Leal-Zimmerman
  - Last names: I-Z
  - Jennifer Garcia

**High School Counselors:**
- **Monroe High School** (360-804-4500)
  - Lisa Woodard | Last names: A-G
  - Sarah Parry | Last names: Gm-Ni
  - Jane Stevens | Last names: Nj-Z
  - Jill Vandemoortele (360-804-4500)

**Leaders in Learning High School**
- Taryn Larson (360-804-4800)

**Sky Valley EC School Counselors:**
- (360-804-2700)
  - JeNell Buchanan
  - Colin Eggers

For help with connections to basic needs such as housing, food, financial assistance, transportation, or medical services, please contact our Behavioral Health Team at bht@monroe.wednet.edu or call (360) 804-2528. For all families, K-12.

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This newsletter is a collaborative effort among school district departments. If you are interested in contributing to future issues of this newsletter, please contact us at selemonroe.wednet.edu for more information. All are welcome!