

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
John A. Wilson Building | 1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 307 | Washington, DC 20004

Questions and Answers Related to Coronavirus (COVID-19): School Mental Health and Wellbeing

April 30, 2020

Supporting Student and Family Mental Health and Wellbeing

Q1: Can students receive behavioral health services from community-based organization (CBO) providers affiliated with schools?

A: Yes. Students who received behavioral health services before the school closure period from CBO providers in school settings are eligible to continue to receive such services via telehealth. The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) has collaborated with DC Public Schools and DC public charter schools to capture data that reflects the work of the CBOs participating in the school behavioral health expansion during the ongoing pandemic.

Q2: How can schools continue to support student mental health and wellness during school closures, remote learning, and social distancing?

A: As possible, school leaders should continue to promote student support teaming practices while students are engaging in distance learning. Behavioral health providers, including those who are employed by partner agencies (e.g., DBH), should be invited to participate in meetings. Teams should explore opportunities to incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) and telemental health services into distance learning plans.

Incorporate social-emotional learning into instructional practices

Teachers can and should incorporate lessons on SEL during instructional time. Opportunities for children to engage in learning and supports related to COVID-19 and its impact on our wellness should also be provided. The use of SEL curriculum, mindfulness, and restorative practices, among others, should be actively encouraged and can be utilized by teachers independently or in partnership with school behavioral health providers. Consider inviting behavioral health providers to virtual classrooms, offering special virtual lessons on this topic, or a combined effort.

Offer telemental health services provided by school-based behavioral health providers

Licensed school mental health providers who normally provide in-person services to students are eligible to provide telehealth services during the emergency. DC Health's guidance on the use of telehealth can be accessed [here](#).

School mental health providers should keep themselves educated on what requirements exist related to their profession's use of telehealth by routinely checking with their appropriate health professional licensing board.

The DC Coordinating Council for School Behavioral Health Community of Practice (DC CoP) Telemental Health 101 in Schools webinar and materials can be accessed [here](#).

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Q3: Where can school staff refer students and families for mental health needs beyond what school behavioral health providers can offer?

A: The Access HelpLine, 1(888) 7WE-HELP or 1(888)793-4357, is the easiest way for families to get connected to services provided by DBH and its certified behavioral health care providers. The Access HelpLine can also activate mobile crisis services.

A simple flyer with information on available behavioral health resources can be accessed [here](#).

Q4: How can we support students and families who have experienced service disruptions due to termination of insurance?

A: DC residents may enroll in private health insurance or apply for Medicaid on the DC Health Link website, which can be accessed [here](#).

Q5: What should school leaders do if their staff have not been able to engage with specific students?

A: If a school determines it has not had sufficient contact with a student, guidance on the specific processes schools and Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) will undertake in response to concerns about students can be accessed [here](#).

Q6: What resources are available to support the mental health of our students' parents and caregivers?

A: All DC families are invited to participate in a series of virtual workshops, hosted by DCPS Parent University Online, which will provide information and start conversations on topics that are top of mind for families. The workshop schedule and recordings of past workshops can be accessed [here](#).

Parents and caregivers of children under 6 are invited to participate in the online Positive Parenting Program, provided by the Department of Behavioral Health, which includes didactic information and interactive role-play scenarios where learners can practice handling challenging situations with young children. The online portal can be accessed [here](#).

- Sign in or create an account
- Enrollment key: dcparents
- Answer the demographic questions
- Launch the program

Teacher, Administrator, and Support Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing

Q7: What resources are available to support the wellness of our staff?

Promoting self-care and mental wellbeing

School leaders are encouraged to share with their staff:

- The DC CoP self-care graphic, which can be accessed [here](#).
- The Wendt Center on Traversing Trauma in Uncertain Times, which can be accessed [here](#).
- The WISE Rapid Response Adult Wellbeing video series, which can be accessed [here](#).
- The Headspace mindfulness app, which is free to all educators and can be accessed [here](#).
- Reminders of health benefits, including Employee Assistance Programs, available to staff through the LEA's insurance provider. Please connect with your LEA's human resources team for more information.

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Supporting staff with grief, loss, and healing

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing has identified key considerations and actions to be taken by employers and their employees and can be of assistance through staff support sessions and training. Steps leaders can take to support their staff can be accessed [here](#).

Q8: What training is available for teachers and administrators as they respond to students' mental health needs?

A: All DC teachers and administrators have access to free, online modules that address student at-risk behavior, including best practices for initiating conversations with students about their mental health. The Support DC Youth portal can be accessed [here](#).

Through June 15, 2020, all DC teachers and administrators can access the trauma-informed practices simulation to further build awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for supporting students at risk for psychological distress. The module can be accessed [here](#).

Q9: What resources are available for school social workers, counselors, and psychologists as they respond to student mental health needs?

A: The DC CoP offers on-demand resources and weekly virtual consultation for school-based behavioral health providers. DC CoP calendar and archived resources can be accessed [here](#).

Additionally, [this guide](#) aims to provide a comprehensive listing of community behavioral health resources for youth that accept DC Medicaid and their current operating status. While comprehensive, the listing is not exhaustive. Please contact agencies directly with specific questions regarding scheduling.

For resources and information about the District of Columbia Government's coronavirus (COVID-19) response and recovery efforts, please visit coronavirus.dc.gov.