A Note from the Executive Director . . .

I feel like I open every fall newsletter with the statement “Where did summer go?” I feel like it is even more applicable this year. As we enter a school year which will be unlike any other, we at Maine Parent Federation understand there are a lot of unanswered questions as well as higher than normal anxiety. We are tracking the changes and guidance closely and are available to assist you in navigating these changes.

We have reopened our central office in Farmingdale and we are available by phone or email 8:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. Our trainings and peer-to-peer Family Navigator Support program will remain virtual for now. We continue to offer new webinars and our pre-recorded webinars are available on the MPF website and Facebook pages. Here are recordings of all the topics we have offered:

- Disability Rights School Re-entry Guidance
- Dr. Laura Blaisdell School Re-entry Guidance
- Self-Advocacy
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Supported Decision-Making
- Special Education Guidance During COVID 19 with DRM
- Home Schooling Your Special Needs Child During COVID 19
- PBIS at Home During COVID 19
- Transition to Kindergarten
- Transition Planning Looking Beyond the High School Years

In addition to the COVID-19 specific webinars we will be offering our regular trainings virtually and will advertise these trainings via E-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and on the MPF website.

We are putting the final touches on two new webinar topics: Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits for Your Special Needs Child and Navigating the Katie Beckett Waiver Program and we have revised our S.M.A.R.T. IEP Goals workshop.

Please continue to watch our website and social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, & YouTube for continued updated information and as always please reach out to Maine Parent Federation with any questions or concerns. We continue to be here for you during these unsure times.

Kind Regards,

Carrie Woodcock, Executive Director
Maine Parent Federation has informational packets available on more than 200 topics. These packets contain researched information, tips, local and national resources, and a list of related lending library material available here at MPF. The following information packets have recently been updated:

**Disability/Disorder Related Topics:**

- Central Auditory Processing
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Related Services
- Respite Care
- Sensory Processing Disorder
- Siblings: Having a Brother or Sister with a Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury

If you would like to receive any of our information packets, or would like information on another topic, please contact MPF by:

- Phone: **(800) 870-7746**
  (Ask to speak with a Parent Information Specialist)
- E-mail: [parentconnect@mpf.org](mailto:parentconnect@mpf.org)
  (Please provide mailing information)

These materials are offered **free of charge!**

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Maine Parent Federation has trained Family Support Navigators (FSN) that can help support your family at no cost to you! A FSN is an experienced parent who lives in your area and is available for one-on-one support. During the COVID-19 pandemic all support is being offered via email, phone, texts, and through online platforms such as ZOOM to support social distancing and keep all families safe.

A FSN can help you:

- organize your paperwork.
- interview a prospective service provider.
- prepare for a meeting with your child’s doctor, school, or service provider.
- provide support at an IEP meeting.
- locate resources in your area.

To learn more about the FSN program, visit our website at [www.mpf.org](http://www.mpf.org) or call us at **(800) 870-7746**.

We are currently accepting referrals to the program. If you are a parent that needs help, know of a family that needs help, or would like to learn how you can become a Navigator, please contact the Regional Family Support Coordinator in your county for more information:

**Androscoggin, Cumberland, Franklin, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc, Somerset, Waldo and York**

Deborah Newcombe, (800) 870-7746,
[dnnewcombe@mpf.org](mailto:dnnewcombe@mpf.org)

**Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, and Washington**

Robin Levesque, (207) 538-0866,
[rlevesque@mpf.org](mailto:rlevesque@mpf.org)
Are you the parent of, or caregiver to, a child with a disability or special health care need?

Would you like to share your knowledge with other Maine families?

If so, this opportunity may be for you!

**Virtual Family Support Navigator Training**

MPF is seeking parents, grandparents, and caregivers of children with disabilities and/or special health care needs who would like to become trained Family Support Navigators (FSN) to provide peer support to other families in their areas. The FSN program matches experienced parents with other parents who need support while learning to navigate systems such as Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, MaineCare, Adult Services, etc., and assists in locating local and statewide resources while helping parents learn to advocate for themselves.

A Family Support Navigator is a part-time independent consultant position. MPF contracts with you to provide up to 10 hours of support to each family you work with. We pay $14.00 per hour for direct contact with a family and .44 cents per mile travel reimbursement. This is a flexible opportunity as you set your own hours/schedule. MPF provides ongoing supervision and technical assistance.

We have divided the training into five two-hour modules that will be held from **10AM to NOON**. The dates are:

*Tuesday, October 13 and Wednesday, October 14*

*Tuesday, October 20 and Wednesday, October 21*

*Monday, October 26*

We offer a $150 stipend for completing the 10-hour training.

Please contact Deborah Newcombe, dnewcombe@mpf.org for an application and job description.

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**The Maine State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) wants your input!**

The SRC is a statewide citizens group created to advise the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in Maine about how well its programs and services match the needs of people with disabilities.

The council meets monthly and invites you, as members of the public, to attend. The meetings are all being held virtually through ZOOM at this time. A meeting link can be obtained by contacting the SRC through the webpage listed below. (Otherwise, meetings are held at the Department of Labor in Augusta.) All meetings take place on the third Monday of the month from 1-3 PM.

The SRC is actively looking to recruit more members to represent the voices of those impacted by disability. Please visit *www.mainesrc.org* for more information.

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**COVID-19 Resources**

Disability Rights Maine: Individualized Remote Learning Plans (LRLP) and the Rights of Students with Disabilities:

[https://drme.org/resources/irlp-guidance](https://drme.org/resources/irlp-guidance)

COVID-19 Special Education Re-Entry Guidance Webinar:

[https://drme.org/resources/covid-19-special-education-re-entry-guidance](https://drme.org/resources/covid-19-special-education-re-entry-guidance)
Virtual Support Groups

Maine Parent Federation is excited to be partnering with Maine Youth Action Network and Penquis Community Action Agency to create an **online group for youth and young adults with disabilities.** We have worked together to plan a series of monthly trainings with the goal of helping youth and young adults gain important self-advocacy and leadership skills. In our first meeting we will discuss our personal values, group values, then discuss "Group Agreements" which will be a tool we use in the following meetings. We hope you can join us!

*Reminder: This group is for youth and young adults only, however, please bring any assistant, personal aide, or accompanying adult you may need.*

When: Sep 22, 2020 04:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Register in advance for this meeting:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcsdOGprT4sH9ayMFI7mSSWUpl3_-OrmM76

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Dylan Campbell (Maine Parent Federation); dcampbell@mpf.org or Karen Sites (MYAN & Penquis); ksites@penquis.org

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**Maine Parent Federation**

**Virtual Parent Support Group**

The meetings will be held twice a month, offering both a daytime and evening option to accommodate your schedule. These meetings are intended to provide a confidential opportunity to connect parents who have children with special healthcare needs or disabilities.

MPF staff will be available to answer your questions, hear your concerns, and provide helpful resources for you and your family.

To join our **Virtual Parent Support Group** on September 24th, 2020 at 12 PM, you can register at the link below.

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZIsc-6vrT4pHNNZhJNeF38VOYzMZXSi0Xgq

Please contact Jodie Hall (jhall@mpf.org) with any questions.
Talking to Your Child About Coronavirus
https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus

News about COVID-19 is everywhere, and it may cause anxiety in children. A psychologist explains how to help.

Whether through news reports, social media, school communications or from friends, it's likely your child will hear about the new coronavirus, named Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19. With so much being discovered about this virus, it can be normal for children to have questions or feel anxious about what they're hearing.

Nicholas J. Westers, Psy.D., ABPP, a Children's HealthSM clinical psychologist and Associate Professor at UT Southwestern, recommends that parents be prepared to talk to their child about the situation in age-appropriate ways.

"As parents, we want to make sure we provide children with honest information that is appropriate for their age and comprehension level," says Dr. Westers. "Creating a safe space for children to ask questions rather than dismissing their fears is an incredibly important way to help them feel safe and supported."

Dr. Westers recommends the following tips when talking to your child about coronavirus to help decrease anxiety.

**Check in and listen.**

If you think your child may have questions or concerns about the COVID-19, start the conversation by asking what they've heard to gauge their knowledge and understanding of the disease. Parents can have these conversations around the dinner table or when driving together in the car. Avoid downplaying the seriousness of the situation by saying things like, "Don't worry about it." Instead, encourage your child to ask questions, even if you don't know all the answers. What's most important is that you listen to your child's concerns, validate their feelings and keep communication open.

"Reassure your child that you are available to talk," recommends Dr. Westers. "Even if you aren't sure how to answer their questions, you can reassure them by saying things like, 'As we find out more information, we'll let you know' or 'If you hear something about this, please ask us.'"

**Monitor media exposure.**

Help your child create healthy boundaries when it comes to media coverage surrounding COVID-19. If your child is old enough (adolescents and teenagers), watch limited news reports or read the news together to encourage conversation. However, make sure to use reputable news sources and take breaks from the news as well.

"There's a difference between being consciously aware and becoming so preoccupied with a topic that we become obsessed," says Dr. Westers.

In addition to limiting the amount of COVID-19 media coverage your child consumes, teach your child about reputable sources of information and how to identify them. Rather than trusting every report shared on social media, encourage your child to turn to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for updated and accurate information about COVID-19.
Encourage self-care.

Self-care is important for all aspects of life but can be especially helpful when calming anxiety. Self-care can mean different things for each child, but can involve:

- Taking media breaks
- Teaching digital health, such as having "no phone" times and keeping technology out of the bedroom
- Encouraging healthy sleep habits
- Maintaining a routine and consistent schedule
- Finding activities your child can enjoy, even if regular activities are limited or canceled due to social distancing recommendations

Look to the experts.

Remind your child that many medical health professionals and infectious disease specialists are currently managing COVID-19 as best as they can. Just as the late Mr. Rogers often said to "look for the helpers," it can be reassuring for your child to know that experts who are really good at their jobs are working hard to discover more about this new virus and to keep us safe.

Remind children what they can control.

Certain events may feel out of our control, especially a new virus, so it's important to remind children what they can control. Refer to the CDC for recommendations on everyday precautions to help prevent the spread of disease, such as:

- Practicing proper hand hygiene (see tips for washing hands)
- Not touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are not feeling well
- Coughing into your elbow and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing (throw the tissue into the trash after sneezing)
- Disinfecting surfaces with household cleaning sprays or wipes

Younger children especially may not fully understand COVID-19 or its implications, but you can still use this as an opportunity to teach them about the importance of hand washing and hygiene to stay healthy.

Address any misconceptions.

With so much information being shared about COVID-19, your child may be exposed to misconceptions about the disease.

"We often fear the unknown, and that can perpetuate myths, including about people who are different from us," says Dr. Westers.

When children hear that the COVID-19 outbreak originated in China, there may be misunderstandings that create stigma around certain people, especially Chinese or other Asian-Americans. Talk to your child to make sure this isn't reinforcing any problematic stereotypes (beliefs) or discriminatory behaviors and use the opportunity to point your child towards reputable sources of information about the virus.
Take care of yourself as a parent.

One of the best ways to take care of your child and address their concerns is by making it a priority to take care of yourself, too.

"An emotionally healthy parent typically makes for a better parent," says Dr. Westers. "In fact, we know that children are quite resilient. Sometimes parents can be the ones who have more fears – but it's important to know that children feed off our own anxieties and concerns."

Model healthy behaviors by labeling your own emotions and communicating how you handle your stress and anxiety. In addition, make sure that you are also practicing self-care, including taking much-needed breaks from media. If you are extremely concerned, consider consulting a mental health professional about ways to take care of yourself so that you can be a better resource for your child.

In a situation with many unknowns, such as the spread of COVID-19, it is normal to feel worry and anxiety. However, if your child is significantly anxious about COVID-19 or any other topic, and the anxiety persists for more than a couple weeks and interferes with their day-to-day functioning, seek help from a mental health professional.

How to Help Children with Anxiety about COVID-19

Create a routine.

One of the best ways to help children cope with change is to implement structure again. "Routines help us anticipate what's coming and make us feel safe and secure," says Kumar. "Structure and stability have been drastically affected for many families, so it's important to establish a new normal for your child."

Work with your child to create a new daily schedule. A healthy routine will encourage children to maintain a regular sleep schedule, healthy eating habits and daily physical activity. Turn to trusted resources, such as your child's school, for suggestions of daily work or activities. Make a goal chart or to-do list and display the chart in an easy-to-see place like the refrigerator. This will allow your child to track progress and be reminded of their hard work.

"Make an effort to acknowledge your child's accomplishments right now," encourages Kumar. "Tiny acknowledgements can make a big difference right now in helping your child's mood."

While a schedule will help, Kumar says it's also okay to acknowledge that the new normal is not normal. "Be understanding of the fact that it's going to take time to adjust," she says. "If the daily schedule doesn't go as planned, that's okay! Try again tomorrow."
Check in frequently and listen.

Check in with your child frequently about how they're feeling and listen without interrupting. Hearing your child's concerns, validating their feelings and keeping communication open is an important way to support them during this time.

You can help your child manage feelings of anxiety by sharing ways you cope when you feel anxious. Let them know it's normal to feel upset or anxious and that you are there to help. Ask your child how you can best encourage them when they don't feel good.

"For example, you can ask 'What are two of your best qualities I can remind you of when you're feeling sad?' or 'What is a book we can read together when you're feeling worried?" suggests Kumar. "Often, your child might just want to hear that you're there for them and you love them."

It's also important to create healthy boundaries when it comes to media coverage surrounding COVID-19, relying only on trusted sources of information.

Catch the signs of anxiety early.

One of the most important tools in managing anxiety is to recognize and address early warning signs of anxiety. Kumar encourages families to think about anxiety on a scale from 1-10. Many times, anxiety will increase to a level 8 or 9 before we ever realize we were creeping up the scale.

Early signs of anxiety can look different for everybody. For some, it might be biting nails or being fidgety; for others, it can look like irritability. Become familiar with the warning signs your child displays, as well as signs that you yourself are feeling anxious. Typical symptoms of anxiety include excessive worry, restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and trouble sleeping.

Anxiety can also present differently depending on a child's age. Young children do not have the words or ability to express how they're feeling, so anxiety can show up in physical ways such as tantrums, meltdowns or aggression. Older children, including teenagers, tend to be more irritable or prone to isolation when they feel anxious. Talk to your children about recognizing these warning signs and give them ways to respond when signs appear.

Teach children coping skills for anxiety.

The more anxious a child is, the more difficult it can be to use rational thinking to calm down. During these times, it's important to use physical coping skills to decrease levels of anxiety.

Children can do things like taking deep breaths, counting backwards from 100 or going to a safe space in your home to relax. Work with your child to identify a place that makes them feel calm, like a bedroom or playroom. Set up the space so they have something tactile to touch or hold, such as a soft blanket, a favorite stuffed animal or a stress ball. Include activities to do in the space, whether reading, drawing a picture or watching a video. These physical actions can help reduce feelings of anxiety and allow you to talk more with your child about how they're feeling as their anxiety goes down the scale.
Focus on what you can control.

Instead of dwelling on issues that are out of our control, teach your child to focus on the things they can control. Focusing on controllable tasks can help children think more logically and rationally.

"A lot of anxiety is steeped in "what-if" thinking which focuses on the worst case scenario. This way of thinking can lead to fear and negativity," explains Kumar. "If you can stop what-if thinking in its early stages, and instead focus on the things you can control, like what you can accomplish today or how you can stay safe, that will help remove those anxious thoughts."

Things children can control include finishing their work or daily tasks, telling family you love them, or drawing a picture or writing a letter to a teacher or friend. Remind your child of the practical steps they are taking to stay safe as well, such as washing hands frequently and social distancing.

Encourage positive thinking.

Reframing negative thoughts to be more positive is a common practice in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), one of the most evidence-based treatments for anxiety. "You can't tell a child to stop being anxious, but you can say, 'Tell me what you're thinking,'" says Kumar. "Then, you can help your child figure out if a thought is based in fact or based in what-if thinking. If it's based in what-if thinking, work together to change it to reflect something positive."

Take time to share what you are grateful for during this time or to share what you appreciate about your child. If you can focus on the positives and encourage positive conversation, moods will eventually change.

Stay connected with others.

While social distancing is an important way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, it can present unique challenges when managing anxiety. "We're being told to isolate, which is actually a symptom of depression," explains Kumar. "That's why it's important to actively and creatively find ways to foster human connection."

Even while maintaining safe social distance, there are ways to connect with others. Video chat or call family and friends, draw pictures for classmates or write your teacher an email or letter. Decorate signs to put in your windows for neighbors to see when they walk by. Some families are even making approved handmade masks to donate to health care workers who are on the frontlines.

Seek professional help if needed.

It's very normal and understandable to experience anxiety during a time like this. However, if your child's anxiety persists and starts to become debilitating, it may be helpful to consult a mental health professional. Signs your child may benefit from professional help include not being able to accomplish everyday tasks, not wanting to participate in activities they used to enjoy or not sleeping well which can affect their energy and appetite.

It might be difficult to identify these signs during this time but continue to monitor your child and reach out for help if signs of anxiety continue.