Dear OLH/SLS Families,

I wanted to take a moment to share some thoughts on how to manage anxiety during these unprecedented times. The Coronavirus Pandemic has understandably caused people, young and old, to feel heightened levels of stress and anxiety. With each news report and press conference, we wait to hear how our lives will change. The uncertainty is difficult and can feel overwhelming, but there are things you and your children can do to help navigate these trying times. Here are some suggestions:

* **Talk with your children about what’s going on** – Our children are smart and perceptive. They know when something big is going on. They recognize when people around them are stressed or scared, so it’s important to be able to talk with them about the pandemic in an age appropriate way.
  + Ask them how they are feeling/ what they are thinking about the Coronavirus Pandemic. Depending on what they say, let them know it’s okay to feel frustrated or worried or confused. All of these feelings are valid.
  + Let them know that you are doing everything you can to keep them safe and that this means following the CDC guidelines.
  + Explain the CDC guidelines about social distancing and hand washing, as it relates to their lives. Kids will want to know why they can’t go play with their friends, why they can’t go to school, why they can’t go to church , or sports practice, or the movies, or the mall. Help them understand that it is for everyone’s protection.
  + Let them know that it’s okay to ask questions, even though we may not have the answers yet.

Take a look at this link for more guidance: <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

* **Educate yourself on what is going on, but don’t go overboard** – In order to help your children understand what is going on, it is important to stay educated about what’s happening in a balanced way. We live in a world of perpetually “breaking news” and minute-by-minute Coronavirus updates. Even though a constant stream of news is available to you, immersing yourself in it may not be the healthiest choice. Don’t cut yourself off from it completely, but don’t become consumed by it either. If you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, it is important to set limits with news media consumption.
* **Help your children stay in a routine** – Hopefully the schoolwork that our teachers are sending out to you is helping with this. Many of our routines have been disrupted over the past few weeks by Covid-19, but we can create new temporary routines to establish structure and stability. Our students are used to being in a routine during the school day. The routine at home need not be as strict as the one they have in school, but it is helpful to create a sense of order and purpose during chaotic times.
* **Find healthy ways to relax** – Physiologically speaking, when we are stressed and anxious our bodies flood with stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol that make us feel uneasy and on edge. Finding healthy ways to relax our bodies and minds helps lessen the flow of these hormones and is important for us and our children when we are trying to manage anxiety and stress. Deep breathing, guided meditation, yoga, listening to music, coloring, knitting, reading, walking outside, dancing – different things work for each of us, but it’s important to find what works for you and your children and schedule it into the new routine. Here’s a link to an easy three minute guided meditation from GoNoodle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRkILioT_NA>
* **Find reasons to laugh** – The old saying about laughter being the best medicine holds a lot of truth when dealing with anxiety and depression. Laughing and maintaining a good sense of humor helps us to keep perspective in unsettling times. This is important for you as parents and important for your children. Maybe this means watching funny animal videos on Youtube, reading a silly story with your child, or watching a funny movie together on Netflix. Maybe this means telling jokes, having an impromptu dance party, or tickling each other. Whatever it means for you and your family, embrace it.
* **Stay connected** – Social distancing does not have to mean social isolation. We are blessed with many ways to stay in touch with the important people in our lives. Maintaining friendships and social connections can help us and our children feel less alone and manage stress. So have a virtual play date, call or video chat with relatives and friends, write letters, make cards, find creative ways to reach out to the people who make you and your family feel valued and loved.
* **Choose gratitude** – Yes there are lots of things to be worried and frustrated about, but there are also many things to delight in and give thanks for. When we feel anxious it can be hard to hold these two realities in balance. We become so preoccupied with what might be that we lose sight of the blessings that already are. It can be helpful find a way to intentionally acknowledge the good in each day. Try to take a moment each day to sit with your children and have each person name three things they are thankful for that day. These things can be broad or specific, but keep a list and challenge each other to find new things each day to delight in an be grateful for. Here are examples of a few things that I’ve put on my list over the past week:
  + My parents
  + Coffee
  + Puppy videos
  + Work Family
  + Internet access
  + eBooks
* And last, but not least**: Make time for God** – Sometimes in the frenzy of our anxious minds, we lose track of the presence of God. Our lives may seem unpredictable and uncertain, but God is not. God is steadfast and present with us always in all things. When we are feeling anxious, it is important to remember God’s presence and open ourselves to prayer. God is always there to listen, to help us shoulder our struggles and wrap us in love. So talk to God about whatever is on your mind and encourage your children to do the same.

As always, if you have questions or something comes up that you want to talk through, my digital door is always open. I check my school email each morning - feel free to send me a message: [kdannals@olhsl.com](mailto:kdannals@olhsl.com).

Stay strong and take care,

Kate Dannals, LCPC

School Counselor

Our Lady of Hope/ St. Luke School