

Views from VanDeWalle

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“Comfort in a Changing World”

By Guest Columnist: Dr. Michelle Krehbiel, Nebraska Extension 4-H Youth Development

“I don’t like this!” This statement is one that children or youth might use during a heated game, when being asked to correct unwanted behavior or when plans change. For those children and youth who were looking forward to milestones like field days, end of school year celebrations, prom, or graduation, they have reason to believe that life can be sad, frustrating, and difficult. The question is how do we, as nurturing adults, help young people cope with these emotions and equip them with the skills they need to be caring, connected, and capable adults? Any loss for a child or youth, such as a failing an exam, death of a pet, changes in family structure, or events from a disaster, can lead to a wide variety of feelings such as disappointment, sadness, loneliness, or anger. These feelings are common reactions to such experiences.

As caring adults, we can do the following to help young people cope.

- Acknowledge feelings and allow youth to talk about their feelings and concerns. Let youth know that it is okay to be sad, scared or confused. Identifying and naming a feeling can be very helpful in trying to understand and make meaning of a situation.
- Be a calm and reassuring presence. Remind youth that over time things will get better.
- Help youth form positive coping skills by setting a healthy example of how to manage feelings like grief, anxiety, fear, or sadness. Teach young people that exercising, meditation, writing in a journal, engaging in a favorite hobby like art, cooking, gardening or sewing are healthy ways to work through disappointment, loss, and grief.
- Expressing gratitude for things that make life enjoyable is another way teach positive coping skills.
- Create an environment where youth can interact with their peers. Using video conferencing, having telephone conversations, or writing letters are ways of connecting with peers. These connections can be helpful ways to provide emotional support for youth, especially for adolescents.
- Simply, listen. If ever youth need adults to listen, it is now. Being able to talk about an experience can support making meaning of a situation which is an important part of grieving. Remember you don’t have to have all the answers. Silence is okay. Youth just need to know you care.

Sometime life can be difficult, unfair, and painful. While adults cannot prevent or change all of these experiences, they can play a significant role in helping young people cultivate and practice skills that give them the ability to develop resiliency or the ability to overcome hardship. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University recommends that adults build supportive adult-child relationships as a way to strengthen a young person’s resiliency. Taking the time to listen and communicate with young people, being a positive example of healthy coping skills, and



simply just being a calming reassuring presence are action steps that adults can implement now. As adults, let's take the time to prepare young people to become caring, connected and capable adults.

For more information and resources about youth social emotional development in difficult times can be found at <https://disaster.unl.edu/families> or by contacting your local county Nebraska Extension office.

Comfort in a Changing World Resources

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard has some great resources. This link is specific to resiliency but I would encourage you take some time to explore other parts of the website.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

Youth.gov which is a website supported by the United State federal government. Its' content was produced but multiple government agencies and has some excellent youth development resources. This link is specific to resiliency. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/definitions-developmental-competencies>

Child Trends has some great work on resiliency. Here is a link to one of their resources.

<https://www.childtrends.org/what-can-schools-do-to-build-resilience-in-their-students>

Additionally, they have a great publication on youth and the COVID19 pandemic.

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/ways-to-promote-childrens-resilience-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Lastly, this is a nice general resources on common mental health issues from Australia. I have always found Australia to have outstanding youth resources.

<https://resources.beyondblue.org.au/prism/file?token=BL/1060> (publication on anxiety and depression)