

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT POLICY

Policy Brief and Purpose

The World Health Organisation (WHO) indicates that a major pandemic entails a psychosocial disturbance that may exceed the affected population's capacity to manage. The COVID-19 pandemic is such a state. The most common reactions include anxiety, distress and depression.

These reactions may result from a fear of contracting the illness, the ability to recover from the illness or even experiencing the death of family members, colleagues or classmates. Learners, practitioners and school management have a responsibility to care for themselves and each other.

Encourage learners to discuss their questions and concerns. Explain it is normal that they may experience different reactions and encourage them to talk to the practitioner if they have any questions or concerns. Provide information in a honest, age-appropriate manner. Guide learners on how to support their classmates and prevent exclusion and bullying.

Ensure staff are aware of local resources for their own well-being. Work with the DSD social workers to identify and support learners and staff who exhibit signs of distress.

- Teach staff about identifying and interpreting emotions: how to handle or react to fear or anxiety; how to identify the signs of depression; and to inform the principal when they identify a learner or colleague that is experiencing any of the above;
- Teach and encourage positive self-talk;
- Provide counselling for the ECD center;
- Refer those that need specialised services.

Prior to the Re-opening of the ECD Centre

Identify organisations, stakeholders and partners in the community or district that can provide additional social, emotional and psychological support.

Once the ECD Centre Reopens

Brief practitioners / staff on the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on learners and adults. Provide information about how to identify when someone needs help. This process must be followed each time a new learner returns to the ECD center.

Identifying When Someone Needs Help

One or more of the following signs may be present:

- persistent fear, worry and anxiety;
- persistent sadness, hopelessness and other overwhelming emotions;
- withdrawal from others (This is not to be confused with the social distancing prescribed by the DoH.);
- loss of interest in personal appearance and unusual lack of energy;
- expression of rage or anger;
- missing work or school; and
- use of, or increased use of drugs or alcohol.

If A Learner or Staff Member Is Identified With the Above Signs

A learner is identified: The class practitioner can speak with the learner to determine whether they (the practitioner) is able to provide emotional or other support. They may refer the learner for basic counselling or a referral to specialised services.

An educator or non-teaching staff is identified: The principal can determine what kind of support is required and either provide the support, or a referral to specialised services.

Activities to Be Used By the ECD Centre

- Talk to the learners about the emotional effects of COVID-19;
- Teach the learners about identifying and interpreting emotions: how to handle or react to fear or anxiety; how to identify the signs of depression; and to inform a practitioner when they identify a classmate that is experiencing any of the above;
- Teach and encourage positive self-talk;
- Refer those that need specialised services.

Sources of Psychological Support

In addition to health professionals, The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) offers free remote counselling (**SADAG helpline 0800567567** or send a **SMS** to **31393**).

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Related Documents:	
Capacity:	Mariske Reynolds
Signature:	