



PROJECT EVERS

Ending Violence and its Effects in Rural Schools

EVERS Newsletter June 2020 * Volume 1, Issue 3

* Message from the Director: Talk it Out

The news about the coronavirus, the economy, and all that it means in communities across the nation is overwhelming and frightening for many of us. We not only have to navigate this crisis for ourselves, but also for our children. Considering the trauma, it has been said: “Most young kids will remember how their family home felt during the coronavirus panic more than anything specific about the virus itself. Our kids are watching us and learning how to respond to stress and uncertainty. Let’s wire our kids for resilience, not panic.”

It can be difficult to limit access to media reports and adult conversations, but when talking with our kids, there are a few things to keep in mind: We should not say the virus is not coming to our house (such a statement could backfire in the event it does), and we should not deny real stories children may hear. Instead, depending on their age/grade level, help children understand the facts

surrounding coronavirus and their new reality of being at home. Look at uncertainty through their eyes. Are they worried you will get sick? Or that they will get sick? Their questions open doors for you to talk about their fears. Remind them that many of the changes – home-schooling is a great example – are efforts to keep everyone safe. Good communication is key to fully addressing any issue, and in this time of uncertainty, ignoring virus issues and fears is not an option.

The pandemic is traumatic for all of us. If you see signs or symptoms of trauma, do what it takes to address them. Be alert, watch for changes in your child’s behaviors, and address the issues. There are many resources available to help you. Start here and we will get through this together.

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* Congratulations Class of 2020!

Congratulations and hats off to the Class of 2020! This year’s milestone looks and feels different from any graduation before. Think about the stories you will have to tell in the years to come.

To each and every student, their teachers, administrators, parents, caregivers, friends, and family, a special shout out to you! You have demonstrated a willingness to modify how we collectively work, study, learn and live. You have embraced a common cause; you have accepted science-based information on public health issues, and you have learned more than one life lesson in the process.

May your futures be bright. You have already made history; we can’t wait to see and celebrate your future accomplishments!





This pandemic is a prime opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and to stop the stigma associated with mental health disorders. The theme for this year's Mental Health Month is Tools 2 Thrive. In reality, our bodies and mind act as one unit and therefore it is important to care for both our emotional and mental health as well as our physical health.

We know that people who live with mental health challenges can thrive, and through their Tools 2 Thrive toolkit, Mental Health America offers practical tools that everyone can use to improve mental health and increase resiliency regardless of the situations. These tools may be especially helpful now because of COVID-19 and social distancing, but the same tools can be modified for future use. All materials can be found at: <https://www.mhanational.org>.

The statistics are real:

- approximately one in five adults (20%) in the United States experiences a mental illness in a given year.
- approximately one in five youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) will experience a severe mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime.



Project EVERS is committed to increasing awareness and understanding of mental health, trauma, and the steps that we can take together to address the need for appropriate and accessible services. It is with that commitment that we share a word from Project EVERS partner, High Plains Community Mental Health Center. *Please see their information on the next page.*



We're Here for You

For 24 Hour Emergency Services
Phone: 1-800-432-0333 or (785) 628-2871

A Licensed Community Mental Health Center
www.hpmhc.com

As the world rapidly changed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, High Plains Mental Health Center also quickly changed how services are provided to Northwest Kansans. At this time, most services are offered by telehealth, either telephone or Zoom video conferencing. This change was necessary to abide by social distancing requirements and to ensure mental health and substance use services would not be interrupted for those who choose to stay home during these uncertain times. Services are continuing to be provided in-person in certain situations as needed, and we are making plans to safely resume in-person appointments in the near future.

Our motto is "We're Here for You" and we are still here for our schools and communities. We are continuing to accept new clients and are working to make the intake process easier, with fillable client forms now on our website at hpmhc.com/services/forms. Additionally, our 24/7 crisis hotline is available at (800) 432-0333. High Plains Mental Health Center offers a sliding fee scale and we do not refuse services based on ability to pay.

During the highly stressful situation of a global pandemic and social distancing, it is likely that mental health symptoms and concerns will increase in our region. We understand this is an especially stressful time for educators and families due to changes in the educational system. Here are some mental health tips that could be helpful:

1. Stay connected as much as you can to families and friends using technology. Social isolation is a significant mental health risk factor.
2. Take good care of your overall health by eating healthy foods, getting moderate exercise if you are able, and sleeping 7 to 9 hours each night. It's important to maintain a regular sleep schedule.
3. Try to maintain as much of a regular routine as you can, and have designated areas for certain activities like work or school.
4. Get outside for fresh air and sunshine! Even sitting on your front porch or walking around the block can help relieve stress.
5. Avoid increasing alcohol consumption during this time due to increased stress levels or boredom.
6. Be aware of your stress levels and mood. If you or a loved one notices significant changes in your regular activity or personality, take those concerns seriously and consider reaching out for support.
7. Talk to someone about how you're feeling. It can be a colleague, friend, family member, minister or professional counselor.

Additionally, we are pleased to offer everyone in Northwest Kansas free, enhanced access to 7 Cups, an online emotional support tool. Get started today at 7cups.com/p/highplains, pass code highplains. This is for ages 13 and up.

Above all, it's very important to realize that mental health is health and it's OK not to be OK. It's typical to experience a wide range of emotions during this highly unusual event. However, if you are concerned about yourself or a loved one, please reach out for support. We don't have to suffer alone. We are Northwest Kansas, and we will get through this – together.

Serving the People of Northwest Kansas

Hays
208 E. 7th
785-628-2871

Colby
750 S. Range
785-462-6774

Goodland
723 Main St.
785-899-5991

Norton
211 S. Norton
785-877-5141

Phillipsburg
783 7th St.
785-543-5284

Osborne
209 W. Harrison
785-346-2184

* Virtual Conference Connects Kansans - Building Resilience in Real Time

On April 9, Project EVERS and partners LiveWell NWK, Cheyenne County Health Department, Kansas Health Foundation, and Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center made regional history by sponsoring a virtual conference - Building Resilience in Real Time.

The conference featured the extraordinary ESSDACK Resilience Team: Rebecca Lewis-Pankratz, Carmen Zeisler, Ginger Lewman, and Katie Perez. Almost 400 people tuned in to hear practical strategies for helping local families and communities build resilience in the midst of crisis. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive with the universal sentiment of “more information please!”

Project EVERS is doing more – messaging, professional development, and tools for teachers, parents, and communities – now and in months to come. For any special requests or needs, please email projectevers@nkesc.org with your questions, suggestions, and ideas!

In the meantime, for anyone who missed the conference, we are very pleased to offer each individual presentation to you via the Project EVERS website:

<https://www.projectevers.org> 

You can find each conference presentation by clicking on the Resources tab.

Learn About Resilience features:

- ▶ Brain Basics
- ▶ Enlightened Witness
- ▶ Promoting Safe Relationships
- ▶ Connect with Check-Ins
- ▶ Regulation Strategies for All
- ▶ Resourcing and Grounding

Learn About Self-Care features:

- ▶ Caremittments We'll Actually Do
- ▶ Getting Back Online

* Walking Through the Website

www.projectevers.org

The Project EVERS website is relatively new, so you may not have explored it yet. Below is a brief explanation on where and how to find the important resources included on the site. As you explore, be sure to give us feedback on what you think would be helpful to see in the near future; we will do our best to accommodate your request as we continue building the site.

Project EVERS has something for everyone. Whether you are a teacher, a school district administrator, a parent, or interested community member, search the entire website for resources that apply to you. Most of the more current resources are currently located in our COVID-19 Padlet. These materials are broad-based in scope and relevant at any time. Look there to find:

- ▶ A webinar presentation with audio: *Supporting Staff, Students and Families During COVID-19*

Helping Children & Families Deal with the COVID-19 Crisis

- ▶ COVID-19 Hierarchy of Needs for Schools
- ▶ What is COVID-19? How It Relates to Childhood Development
- ▶ COVID-19 Infographic – Helping Kids Cope
- ▶ Seeking Additional Help
- ▶ Scheduling & Activities
- ▶ Self-Care & Coping
- ▶ Information & Communication

Self-Care Resources

- ▶ Quick Self-Assessment During COVID-19
- ▶ Self-Care Assessment Worksheet
- ▶ Self-Care Plan Worksheet

Hotlines & Resources

- ▶ Distress Hotline
- ▶ Center for Disease Control (CDC) Instructions



Spanish Information about COVID-19

A screenshot of a Padlet board titled 'EVERS - COVID-19 Resources' by user 'osymigrant.org'. The board is organized into four columns of resource cards. The first column contains a card for a webinar on supporting staff, students, and families during COVID-19, with a note to download audio. The second column features a card for the 'COVID-19 Hierarchy of Needs for Schools' infographic, which includes a pyramid diagram. The third column has a card for 'Self-Care Resources' featuring a 'Mental Health Check-In!' with a list of five questions and a 'How are you right now?' section. The fourth column contains a card for 'Hotlines & Resources' featuring a 'Disaster Distress Helpline' QR code and a 'Having Trouble Coping After a Disaster?' PDF document.

Stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic have been developed to help protect communities from the coronavirus, but what happens when home is not a safe place? Those orders designed to keep us safe can sometimes present extremely specific dangers to people who are not safe at home.

Statistics tell us that one in four (25%) women experience violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. We know that two out of three (66%) children are exposed to trauma and violence. With schools, community centers, and public playgrounds shut down in most areas, there may be no safe refuges for kids as they too are stuck at home and likely witnessing more domestic abuse than in the past.

Yet the sobering reality is that reports of abuse and neglect against children are dropping. Approximately 80% of abuse and neglect reports come from mandated reporters including health professionals, educators, and first responders, none of whom have eyes on what is happening behind closed doors right now. There is anecdotal evidence that phone calls to police stations are rising in response to domestic disputes, so we know people are reaching out in some cases.

In normal circumstances, the faith, social, health and medical, human service and educational, legal and judicial communities create a system of care and protection. However, in these pandemic days, it is extremely hard to maintain those important connections to get the help and support families may need. Anything that we can do to reduce stress is vital right now.

For individuals who may need help, or when friends and family are worried about someone, here are a few tips for staying safe:

- ▶ Create a safety plan. This is easier said than done during the pandemic, but if possible, have ideas or plans in place for someone to contact and somewhere to stay.
- ▶ When possible, reach out and check in with others every day. Social connections should not go away in this environment of physical distancing; everyone needs help and support during this difficult time.
- ▶ Private conversations, code words, or texts can be useful means of indicating that intervention or emergency response is needed.
- ▶ Take care of yourself. Getting through this pandemic while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming, so taking care of your physical, emotional, and mental health is even more important. Do something for yourself every day to ease anxiety and fear.
- ▶ 24/7 parenting is hard. See if there are creative ways to find relief. Friends or grandparents can offer to read a book – even over the phone or via Zoom or FaceTime – to make kids feel extra special, while giving parents a needed break.

If you or someone you know may be experiencing domestic violence, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE, that is 1-800-799-7233, or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE, that's 1-800-656-4673. You can also text the Crisis Text Line: Text home to 741741. Someone will be there to listen.

* Spring Cleaning

Why would an article about spring cleaning appear in a newsletter devoted to children and families who have been affected by trauma or violence in their homes or communities? Because this is spring cleaning for the mind!

For many, the return of warm weather is the time for deep cleaning homes and yards. Spring is a time for growth and renewal. It is energizing and refreshing, and we feel ever so much better when it is done! The same can be true for our mental health. If we focus on some of the “grit” we accumulated over the year, this is a great time to declutter our minds and our hearts. Decluttering our lives from negativity and drama rejuvenates our minds with positivity and helps us start this season refreshed and renewed. Here are a few items to add to your mental health cleaning list:

Declutter:

- ▶ *Toxic relationships and drama* – It is never wrong to end a relationship that no longer fits who you are as a person.
- ▶ *Bad habits* – Eliminate habits that are counter-productive to your well-being.
- ▶ *Negative talk* – Get rid of any tendencies to gossip or complain. Venting can be a great stress reliever, but too much can make old hurts and feelings resurface.
- ▶ *Negative thoughts* – Get rid of any self-condemning thoughts and self-doubt.
- ▶ *Your physical space* – It’s an old cliché that is true: “Clean house, clear head!”

Rejuvenate:

- ▶ *Your physical health* – The key to better mental health is maintaining good physical health.
- ▶ *Gratitude* – Focus on things that make you feel grateful!
- ▶ *Positive friendships* – Let your creativity thrive and explore where it takes you.
- ▶ *Mindfulness* – Reflecting and being aware of our thoughts and feelings allows us to be better prepared to handle any life stresses.

