



# MENTAL HEALTH MONDAYS



## Key Takeaways – May 11, 2020 | 10 a.m.

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A discussion about how the current pandemic has interrupted students' lives, ways for them to cope, and resources that parents have for supporting their children during this transition

- 1. Know that school based support is available.** The School District of Lee County is here to support all of our students and our families virtually. Our school based supports are our school counselors, our school social workers, our school psychologists, and our school nurses. We want to make sure that you know that even though we're not in our brick-and-mortar schools, all of those people are here to support you and your students through this virtual environment. The many changes that this pandemic has brought to our country, our state, our community, and our homes, may be causing many of our students to experience feelings of sadness, isolation, anxiety, and fear. If you have a student that may be experiencing some of these feelings, please reach out to your school counselor, school social worker, school psychologist, or your school nurse. These school based mental health professionals can be reached via email and contact you either via Zoom or via phone.
- 2. Reach out for support when you or your child has a mental health concern.** During the pandemic, if we're physically ill, we're going to call our doctor and share what's going on. We also want you to know that you can reach out to your mental health professionals. Your child may be feeling a little sad or your student may be disengaged, and they may be spending more time than usual in their room. Please feel comfortable to reach out to school-based support. We're here to support your children's mental health. These services are not discontinued since we're not physically in school.
- 3. Help your children combat the fear of the unknown by being prepared.** Do you have food, shelter, and other necessities for yourself and your students? If not, it's so important to reach out to your school-based professionals because we can help connect you with different resources that may be able to help you with those areas of need.

- 4. Identify how your family is going to keep up with the rapid change of information.** This does not mean being connected to social media or the news 24/7. You as a caregiver need to determine what news sources you are going to rely on and what you're going to listen to. Listen and look for the information that you need, so that you can provide that information to your students if they have any questions. We need to make sure that the information that we share with our students is accurate and up to date. We want to make sure that we're not sharing any information that may be from a Facebook post, Instagram, or any of places that are not reliable sources.

Plan how you are going to discuss information with your students. Be conscious of where you have the conversation (preferably wherever your student is comfortable), and how you are going to talk to them about this information. Depending on the age of the student, answer their question in a way they will understand, and only answer their question. Don't go overboard and give them more information than what they're able to process. It's always best to just answer their question.

- 5. Share with your student what protective steps we're taking in our community.** Since we're opening our community in stages, not everyone can go out to a restaurant at the same time, and if they need a haircut, that may look a little bit different. It's important to let your student know that there are a lot of people trying to keep them safe nationally, statewide, community-wide, and in our homes.
- 6. Give yourself grace and compassion.** As adults and caregivers ourselves we are experiencing anxiety. It's important to be patient with our students and ourselves. It's okay to step back and be patient and say, right now is not a good time, and take a minute to refocus. As parents and caregivers, we need to take care of ourselves. It's okay to not be perfect parents. If you are present with your children, that's sometimes all we can do.
- 7. Create a schedule.** Be consistent as much as possible when it comes to bedtime, meals, and exercise. Children need to have a "known." It's the unknown that causes the anxiety. It doesn't matter the age of your student, it's really important to have a schedule. It may be more difficult for adolescents and high school students to try to get them on a schedule, but they still need a consistency. A schedule of sleeping all day and being up all night will make it very difficult for them once we are back to our brick-and-mortar schools. Remember to give your student small breaks. Even though a regular school day was typically 7 ½ hours, students cannot sit at a computer for 7 hours a day.



8. **Find fun activities that you can do as a family.** What have you done in the past when things got a little bit rough and we felt a little bit sad? Think, what did we do as a family? This could be talking about it as a family, listening to music, going on a family walk, reading a book together, or cooking.
9. **There are several interactive online resources for students and families.** We have three resources that we recommend that can be found [here](#) on our website. One of these is [Mind Yeti](#), a mindfulness app that offers developmentally appropriate mindfulness sessions that you can preview as a parent and then chose to do with your children and even do them yourself. Another is [Little Children, Big Challenges](#) which focuses on building children’s resilience. [Parent Teen Connect](#) helps families, especially with teens, address hot-button topics.

## Questions from viewers:

### **Q: Where can we find the parent guide and find more information about resources?**

A: You can find this all of this information on our website, [leeschools.net](https://leeschools.net). While we do have a mental health and wellness portal on the website, everything about COVID-19 can be found on the red banner on the top of our homepage with white text. On that page there is a link on left that says “supporting your child through COVID-19”. That’s where all of these resources are.

### **Q: Can you suggest a way to get a teen to change their sleep and awake times back to being up during the day and sleeping at night?**

A: Remember when our children were very little we would tell them that they’re going to go to bed at 8 p.m. but what we’re really going to do is start at 7:30 p.m. to get you ready for bed? It’s kind of the same thing. If they’re staying up until 1 or 2 a.m., it’s probably not going to be successful right away to get them to go to bed at 10 or 11 p.m., because their body is not used to it. Take it in small increments.

Part of setting up reasonable bed times is getting them off social media. It’s unfortunately having rules in place where at 11 p.m. you get their phone, or you change the Wifi password and tell that “tomorrow morning you can get the password back.” It’s really difficult with teenagers because you will get pushback, but it’s easier to do things in small increments, especially right now, with so much change. When you start cutting them off from their connections, they can get cranky. We’re social people.



Give them tasks to do; assigning daily chores while they're home is a way to give them something engaging and can help them get some exercise. Our children are so scheduled and organized when we are in our regular, normal way of living. They were constantly moving and getting exercise to work their anxiety and stress out physically.

**Q: What do I do if we've lost a loved one during this pandemic?**

A: Everything is a little more heightened right now. What we want to do is make sure your family has support. Support each other within your family and with whatever friends you connect with. If your student is having a hard time adjusting to that loss, please reach out to your school, because we can connect you with some of those additional support. Even though we're not physically going to the building every day, we want our families to know that we're still here for them.





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## About Kids' Minds Matter

The goal of Kids' Minds Matter is to raise awareness about the need for pediatric mental and behavioral health care services and to raise the funds required to make these services available in the region through Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Lee Health. An estimated 46,000 Southwest Florida children are impacted by mental and behavioral health disorders like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psychosis, substance abuse, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As part of the region's strategic solution to the children's mental and behavioral health epidemic in Southwest Florida, Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to fostering partnerships that support existing services, identifying and filling gaps in the continuum of care, and innovating new treatments.

Philanthropic support for Kids' Minds Matter has allowed Lee Health and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida to: implement a tiered model of care that clinically aligns community, inpatient and outpatient care; hire additional psychiatrists, child advocates and other mental health professionals; offer Mental Health First Aid training to local pediatricians, emergency service providers and others who work directly with children; renovate an outpatient center in Fort Myers where a child's needs can be addressed in a therapeutic setting; and launch a first-of-its-kind Pediatric Digital Cognitive Behavioral Health diagnostic and treatment protocols interlaced with Tele-Psychology support to treat anxiety, depression and trauma. Most recently, Kids' Minds Matter introduced mental health care navigators into Lee and Collier County schools who will help families find resources and care to address their child's mental healthcare needs.

The "Mental Health Mondays" segments are a public forum, designed for open discussions that benefit a large audience, and to provide real-time resources and advice from pediatric mental health professionals and advocates. The information shared on this platform is intended for general public consumption and not intended for individual treatment. The views, advice, and resources shared by each guest speaker are solely their own and are not endorsed by Lee Health, Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Kids' Minds Matter. Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to raising awareness and essential funding to enhance pediatric mental & behavioral health programs, services and access to care in Southwest Florida. To learn more about Kids' Minds Matter, visit [KidsMindsMatter.com](http://KidsMindsMatter.com).

