

TRANSITIONING TO THE NEW NORMAL: ADVICE FOR PARENTS IN THE CURRENT PHASE OF THE PANDEMIC.



Dr Michael Carr-Gregg
Child and Adolescent Psychologist

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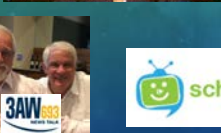
THANK YOU

STEOPLE

James Fulford-
Talbot

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WHO AM I?



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GENERATION COVID



- come of age while COVID-19 put their life on hold
- career ambitions were deferred, part-time jobs evaporated
- social lives shriveled up
- youth are coming to terms with the loss of almost 2 years of their lives
- no other group of young people across the country have suffered quite like those in Melbourne

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Were lockdowns worth it?

- six lockdowns
- most recent one lasting 77 days
- 263 days under strict stay-at-home health orders
- Great calamity
- Overrun hospitals
- Mental health costs



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PROF IAN HICKIE



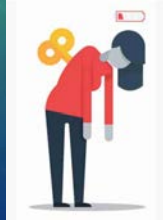
Thursday 8th MARCH 2020

"...Our best case scenario is a 25% increase in suicides in the next year. That's an additional 750 additional deaths over the 3,000 lives lost every year. The worst case scenario if the recession deepens.... that we could see up to 1500 additional lives lost each year. That would be the young, casual workers, people who lose their jobs."

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WHY SOME PARENTS FEEL DEFLATED COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN

- Surge capacity is a collection of adaptive systems – mental and physical – that humans draw on for short-term survival in acutely stressful situations
- For many parents, their brains and bodies are simply fatigued ... in part, that's because many of them have been relying on SC
- keep us going for only so long - eventually depleted – they need a break to recharge



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TWO MOST COMMON EMOTIONS AFTER LOCKDOWN



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WHAT ARE PEOPLE WORRIED ABOUT?

- struggling with their mental health as restrictions lift
- what is life going to look like post-lockdown?
- we have been told for a long time going out was not safe
- Uncertainty - what might go wrong? what might hurt me? How long will it last?



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- Our minds hate uncertainty
- can tell us all kind of scary stories at this unusual time
- We fill in the gap with lots of 'what if' stories



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IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?

instead of getting caught up in these stories that our mind keeps telling us, we can **notice** and **name** them



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THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT
PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES TO SHARE
WITH YOUR FAMILY AS WE COME OUT OF
LOCKDOWN

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1. Tell them they are not
their thoughts, rather they
can be the observer of their
thoughts

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You can choose your thoughts just like
you choose which bus to take



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You can choose your thoughts just like
you choose which bus to take



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STRATEGY NUMBER 2:

FOCUS
on what you can
CONTROL

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You will find
that sometimes
it is necessary
to let things go
simply because
they
are just too
heavy

I CANNOT CONTROL

(So, I can LET GO of these things.)



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WAS THERE AN UPSIDE?

- For example, the Royal Children's Hospital National Child Health Poll highlights that **three quarters of parents** report that their families are becoming closer
- almost half feel more connected to their child since the pandemic.



<https://www.rchpoll.org.au/polls/covid-19-pandemic-effects-on-the-lives-of-australian-children-and-families/>

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WHAT WERE THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

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Victorian teenage suicide threats jump 184pc amid pandemic



Pandemic pain: Young people experiencing greater mental health distress and job losses during Covid-19



Self-harm soaring in teenagers

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS – GOOD & BAD



- Human beings are social animals
- We cope with adversity and threat by huddling in social groups supporting each other
- During wars suicide rates go down
- Society pulls together and acts together

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- GPs are seeing increased numbers of children, young people and families that are **experiencing issues maybe for the first time** and coming forward not having had a background of stress or mental health experiences in the past
- Some have had a **reactivation of problems** that they've had in the past



Professor Lena Sanci, Head of Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne

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- Importantly, **rates appear to be increasing over time** and are higher in those areas which are **experiencing longer lockdowns** suggesting that they are at least in part related to the impact of these restrictions on our young people



<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.08.15.21262087v1>

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Dr Murray Wright

"probably the most sustained and serious stress that many of us are going to face in our lifetimes".

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WHY HAS THIS BEEN SO HARD FOR OUR STUDENTS?

- First time this generation has been asked to sacrifice individual wellbeing for the community
- Cumulative effects of lockdown
- Lost rhythm and structure
- Monotony
- Loneliness
- Loss of important experiences



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2 GROUPS I WORRY ABOUT

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PRE-SCHOOLERS

- Part of the covid generation of missed milestones
- Undivided attention for so long
- Avalanche of separation anxiety
- So what to do to manage transition back?
 - Play dates
 - Routines



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MISSED RITES OF PASSAGE

- 18th birthdays
- Obtaining driver's license
- Overseas school trips
- Valedictory dinners
- End of year music recitals
- Drama Performances
- Schoolies



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WHY IS IT PARTICULARLY HARD FOR ADOLESCENTS?



- Negotiating peer and intimate relationships
- Achieving independence from parents and other adults
- Development of a realistic, stable, positive self-identity
- Acquisition of skills for future economic independence

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ARE THEY LANGUISHING?



Languishing is present when there is an absence of wellbeing and can potentially be a precursor to mental health problems.

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WHAT YOU WILL NOTICE



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WHAT PARENTS CAN DO?

- Name it
- Remind them they are not alone
- Be understanding & reassuring
- Seek out uplifting activities
- Small steps towards a goal
- Digital detox
- Encourage contacts with peers



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WHAT IS A USEFUL PARENT NARRATIVE?



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WHAT SHOULD PARENTS BE SAYING?

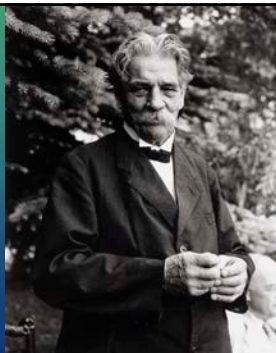
- Set the emotional tone
- This has been very challenging
- We have protected public health until vaccines were rolled out
- Can't have a well functioning economy with an out of control pandemic



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“Modelling isn’t the best way to teach – it is the only way to teach.”

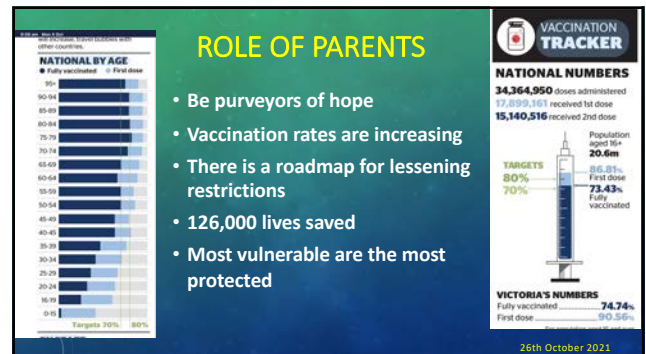
ALBERT SCHWEITZER



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ROLE OF PARENTS

- Be purveyors of hope
- Vaccination rates are increasing
- There is a roadmap for lessening restrictions
- 126,000 lives saved
- Most vulnerable are the most protected



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THE PRINCIPLES OF GREAT PARENTING DON'T CHANGE BECAUSE OF CORONAVIRUS

- Developmental Perspective
- Set limits and boundaries
- Have consequences
- Use Vitamin 'N'
- Foster empathy
- Display kindness
- Create family rituals

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FAMILY RITUALS COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWNS

- powerful organizers of family life that offer stability especially during times of disruption, stress and transition
- give children a sense of meaning, belonging and validation
- promote a sense of identity in the child, which will later serve as a basis for adult development

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SO WHAT MIGHT PARENTS DO IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES?

- Keep the lines of communication open
- Answer all their questions as well as you can, talking things through can help them feel calmer
- Keep as many regular routines
- Above all parents need to manage their own state of mind

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WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS BE DOING NOW

- Educate parents
- Let students talk (go off timetable)
- Build connections
- Look to the Arts
- Encourage mindfulness
- Look to ritual
- Be vigilant

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SIGNS OF TROUBLE TO LOOK FOR

- Irritability
- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite changes
- Withdrawal from peers
- Angry outbursts that seem out of character
- difficulty concentrating in lessons, being tearful
- Decline in usual spark

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EATING DISORDERS

- Isolation
- changes to food and exercise routines
- uncertainty around changing restrictions
- lack of social connection

1800 33 4673

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LOCK DOWN AND THE STUDENTS WITH ADHD

- Were already struggling
- Not enjoying restriction of freedom
- Many are undermedicated
- Home learning shows parents how hard it is to learn with ADHD
- Routine is crucial (bite size schedule)
- Focus on positive rewards
- Talk about anxiety and worry
- Act proactively

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18 months or younger	18 months to 2 years	2 to 5 years	6 or older
No screens are still best. The exception is live video chat with family and friends.	Limit screen time and avoid solo use. Choose high-quality educational programming, and watch with kids to ensure understanding.	Limit screen time to an hour a day. Parents should watch as well to ensure understanding and application to their world.	Place consistent limits on the time spent and types of media. Don't let screen time affect sleep, exercise or other behaviors.

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TIPS TO MOTIVATE TEENAGERS FOR SCHOOL STUDY AND HOMEWORK

MOTIVATION

Loading...

- Work out the why
- Put a timer on
- Celebrate the wins
- Move
- Play music

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TIPS FOR COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN



- Adjust your expectations
- Take it step by step
- Focus and act on what you can control
- Make plans you are comfortable with
- Seek help early
- Have conversations

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ONE SIZE WILL NOT FIT ALL

- Different students within the same class will have very different experiences of the pandemic
- varying levels of coping skills and resilience in dealing with those experiences.
- Having an open mind about what pupils may be going through, how they will be coping with it and what support they need



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7 big wellbeing tips

1. Address your own basic needs
2. Give your family something to imitate
3. Expand your gratitude practice
4. Focus on what you can control
5. De-escalate your nervous system
6. Cultivate compassion
7. Rekindle Connections



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TRANSITIONS



- Inside the pain of every transition is an invitation to grow
- Transitions are easier with self honesty and community
- Don't squander your transitions

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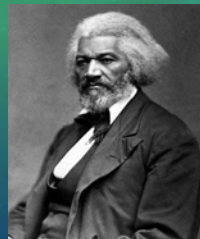
Your child's
mental health is
more important
than their grades.



**LEARNING MIGHT
HAVE TO WAIT**

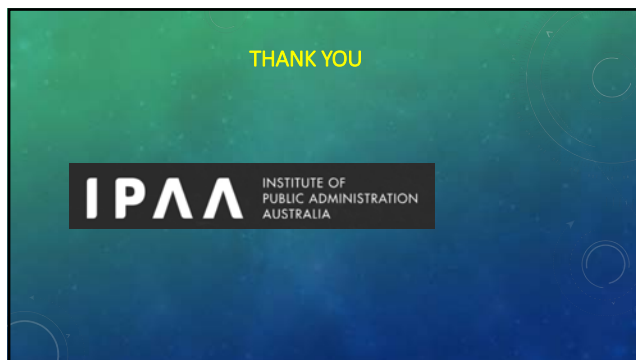
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FREDERICK DOUGLASS



"It is easier to build
strong children than to
repair broken ones."

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