

ATT Parent Workshop March 15, 2020

Panelists:

Mrs. Debbie Cardash, REACH

Ms. Carly Krawetz, Social Worker at Hillel Torah

Mr. Phil Zbaraz, Counselor at Ida Crown Jewish Academy

Rabbi Shmuel Tenenbaum, Mashgiach at Yeshivas Tiferes Tzvi

Rabbi Ephraim Goldman, TAG

Opening Framing: This conversation will try to address how to work together to provide a measure of comfort and well-being to all during these trying times. Since this is an adjustment period for adults and children, how can we reduce anxiety and tension at home?

How am I going to manage my stress?

Don't do it alone. Humans are wired to deal with challenges in community. Reach out to someone – a family member, a trusted neighbor. Chances are what you are feeling will resonate with someone else and you can support each other.

Sleep helps challenges go better so try to get enough sleep. Using the airplane analogy, "always put your own oxygen masks first". Don't forget to breathe. Deep breaths help with anxiety.

Stress exhibits in different ways. Try to find a moment to reflect on what you think is contributing to your elevated stress. Maybe even write it down so you can organize it. When you identify what stresses you, you might journal what helps you, and try to provide that help for yourself.

This is a time of stress in Jewish homes naturally, post Purim and pre-Pesach. Perhaps discuss with your children how they are feeling stressed. Don't make suggestions what is stressing them, listen to them. Then discuss all of these stressors and how the family can work together to resolve the stressors.

What are some strategies for talking to your children?

First, how old are they? That affects the nature of the questions, the tone, and what the conversations might sound like.

Pre K-Middle school: be honest with them, show empathy, and check in with them. This age has simpler concerns, e.g. "what about my birthday party?" Listen to them and their needs. Ask them what they've heard and what they are feeling. Don't make assumptions as to what they need. Meet them where they are emotionally and developmentally. Explain that schools are closed to keep them safe and healthy. Don't give too much information but just enough.

Adolescents: Older students might miss their academic challenges. Students who participate in team sports are impacted with respect to their physical needs. Perhaps they can go out running with friends. They may miss emotional needs through friends as well as their spiritual needs. Try to ascertain what domain is really impacting them?

Parent should tell children that it is OK to feel stress. Reassure children that we are here to support each other within families and within the community. Do exercises that can relieve stresses and relax people. Remember that children need their social peer interactions. Reassure them and encourage them to interact with siblings and call their friends. Teamwork activities help. Also, involve the children in the decision making. Empower them to have their voice in how the day will be orchestrated.

Unpredictability provides a lot of stress for adolescents and humans in general. The sooner the family can come together and provide structure and some predictability will help relieve the ambiguity and uncertainty that exists.

Recognize that there will be a certain level of chaos. What can we do to create structure? Keep some of the school's culture and structure encoded even at home. A good morning starts with a planned night. Davening, some learning, breakfast, lunch, supper provide structure. This is important for all ages. For younger children, can use pictures for creating the schedule.

150 things to do when you don't know what to do – online resource. (attached) . Make strips and put them in a jar for kids to pull out when they are bored. Ask the children to look at this and help with the structure in the home. Children who are starting to read and older children – silent reading in the schedule or some other independent work. We all have jobs – including children. Parents and children can each make lists of what needs to happen before Pesach. That will help many of the chores get done where everyone agrees.

Parents must take care of themselves too. Decide what you as a parent need during the day. Children will get their needs met (sometimes at the expense of the adults). Be thinking of healthy, high protein food so we can all be as patient as possible. Children should help in the kitchen. That will be a lesson learned as well. Cooking teaches math and cooperation. Parents who are structured will model for their children how they are dealing with this situation as well. By giving children too much power will make the situation much worse.

What are things a parent can do when the stress has built up over the days together and things appear to be coming unglued? Try to evaluate what kinds of things you need to let go of to reduce the stress level and get things back into manageable level? Do you need help from other people? Lean on neighbors, extended families, community. Talk to your children.

How do adults take care of their own needs? Make a list with your spouse and children and let them know what this looks like. Children might have to do something while the adults have their time that they need.

How will our children learn? We need to provide them with a learning structure with some accountability. This will take creativity. The children might be able to help each other – in reading, learning. There will be technical difficulties. We need to laugh and be transparent with children that things will not be perfect so need to be flexible as we try to do our best. Make lemonade out of lemons. Children will need to do *chesed* at home to help siblings when necessary.

Parting advice tips:

It is OK that we do not have all the answers. We will all do our best to answer questions. Don't forget to breathe.

Feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress are not new phenomena. Yes, this situation is unprecedented but dealing with adversity is nothing new. There has never been a time in our history where we have not been challenged. We have the innate ability to rise to the challenge. We are doing this in community – we are not alone even if at moments we feel alone. Therefore, reach out to others.

We are in it with the world together. We have the choice to laugh or cry. Make the best out of it and rise to the occasion.

Rabbi Ephraim Goldman speaks about the use of technology and its challenges:

Everyone has different levels of access. Once you allow the use of technology it is very hard to cut back on its use later on. Remember, there will be long term consequences. While a movie might calm children for 2 hours, it is not a perfect solution, just a temporary Band-Aid. If children are not getting along with each other, they will start up with each other again after the movie.

The following suggestions are things that we should be doing all the time:

- 1) Children should never have access to technology in their own privacy behind closed doors. Any access must be supervised and out in the open.
- 2) Technology use should not be too close to bedtime. This interrupts sleep patterns.
- 3) Technology use should not be too long at one time. Use 20-30 minute increments at a time. Then do something else more active and engaging.
- 4) Everything we give to children should be filtered.
- 5) Have a conversation with children re: why these are precautions taken with technology.
- 6) We can show our children there are learning benefits to using technology properly. The weeks ahead will see many new shiurim online and via video conference.

There is a vast difference between passive and active engagement with technology. Children who use technology must be involved in some kind of activity which is healthier and uses their minds. Some examples: Google maps – type in any address and zoom in. Can Google world locations and see them and learn about them. Scratch – coding for kids. Be cautious of any activities that interact with the outside world – these can be very dangerous.

In conclusion, this is the beginning of a conversation. We hope to use this format to reconnect in the future. Comments can be forwarded to amoller@att.org.

If families have more issues that require more intensive support, connect with your physician or health professional.