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The New Work/Life Balance: When the Office and School Come Home

With school closures across the country, many callers and crisis counselors are experiencing additional pressure to balance remote schooling and work. Below are general recommendations and resources that could be explored with callers as part of a collaborative safety plan or be used by crisis center staff in transitioning to remote work:

Creating structure

- Consider setting a schedule that includes wake up time, meal times, and dedicated school/work time.
- During school and work, try to limit distractions such as unnecessary electronics and social media.
- Consider staggering work and school time when possible, to reduce interruptions.
- Consider listing school related tasks at the beginning of each day and rewarding progress.
- When you're "off" work/school, refrain from work/school related activity.
- Younger children will likely have fewer structured activities from school. Engage them in creative play whenever possible.

Logistical planning

- Designate a specific space for work/school activities
- If you do not have internet service, check with your local providers. Many are offering free internet service to families without access.
- If more than one adult is working in the home, talk about your daily work calendars, meeting schedules, or other times when you will be less available to assist children in the home. You may be able to stagger the times when one of you is available and plan more effectively for times when both adults need to be occupied with minimal interruptions.

Creative learning opportunities

- Consider using this time to teach life skills and spend quality time together, such as cooking a favorite meal together, home maintenance, etc.

Self-care

- Recognize when you or your kids may need a break. Consider utilizing breathing exercises, grounding techniques, or Safespace <https://www.vibrant.org/safespace/>
- Incorporate breaks that include physical activity. Youtube offers many free workout videos for kids and adults.
- Encourage safe social interaction with fellow classmates and/or family, perhaps by phone or video call.
- When weather allows, get outside. Take a family walk after lunch or at the start or end of your work day. I Spy or Nature Scavenger Hunts can motivate and occupy kids while taking walks in the neighborhood while maintaining social distance.
- See our Tip Sheet "Support and Resources for Crisis Counselors Working During COVID-19 Crisis" <https://networkresourcecenter.org/download/attachments/62554114/Support%20and%20Resources%20for%20Crisis%20Counselors%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Crisis.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1585075361104&api=v2>

Communicating about COVID-19

- Review resources for how to talk with your kids about the Coronavirus in an age appropriate way:
 - PBS Kids: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>
 - NPR Comic Book: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Considerations specific to crisis counselors

- While answering calls try to limit background noise.
- Crisis counselors will need to educate family members about issues revolving around confidentiality and the importance of limited distractions.
- Supervisors should discuss with crisis counselors potential distractions and interruptions; scheduling changes may be necessary.
- Develop protocols for instances when a caller may hear background noise and how the crisis counselor should address it. Keep in mind that much of the country is adapting to the current COVID-19 crisis and appropriate acknowledgement of your center's need for remote work in order to continue services may be an acceptable approach.
- Though background noise may happen it should not become an acceptable norm. Consider having crisis counselors include in their call documentation when a caller indicates hearing background noises, the crisis counselor's response, and the circumstances that created the noise.
- Test your environment for noise. Have your children or others in the home do a few activities in the rooms adjacent or above where you will be working (examples: TV on, indoor exercise, music playing). Call a colleague to determine if they are able to hear background noise. Adjust accordingly by asking that activities you have determined to be too loud not be completed while you are taking calls or that they be moved elsewhere during that time.
- If crisis counselors are unable to maintain focus on callers and/or reduce background noise in their current remote circumstances, consider: changing shift times to a quieter time, assigning other tasks, such as training, QA, chat/text, compiling/organizing training documents, etc.

Educational Support Resources:

BrainPOP: <https://www.brainpop.com/> Offers animated videos covering many subjects, the site is currently offering free access to families.

Go Noodle: <https://www.gonoodle.com/> Movement and mindfulness videos created by child development experts. Available for free at school and at home.

Junior Achievement: <https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/program-resources> Free modules for all grade levels on work-readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy skills.

Khan Academy: <https://www.khanacademy.org/> offers video instruction and practice on many subjects including math, science, art and test prep.

LibriVox: <https://librivox.org/> Offers free public domain audiobooks read by volunteers.

Local Library Online Services: Many libraries offer ebooks that can be read for free through an app or ereader. Some library systems also offer foreign language programs and live tutoring.

PhotoMath App: <https://www.photomath.net/en/> Available in the Google play and IOS app store, allows parents to take a picture of math problems in a textbook or on a worksheet then generates the solution.

Storyline Online: <https://www.storylineonline.net/> Children's books read by celebrities.

The Kennedy Center Lunch Doodles with Mo Williams: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/> Draw, doodle and explore new ways of writing by visiting Mo's studio virtually once a day for the next few weeks.

XtraMath: <https://xtramath.org/#/home/index> Offers basic math fact practice.