

Primary Considerations

During times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, students are at a greater risk for negative emotional responses that can interfere with both their learning and their daily lives.¹ Districts must identify tools and practices that will support students' social-emotional well-being, even when schools are closed. Previous crises, such as during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, have highlighted the need to establish for children a sense of "control, empowerment, and normalcy."³

Students' Social-Emotional Needs During Times of Trauma

- Feeling of safety
- Sense of belonging and community
- Reassurance
- To be heard

Source: ASCD²

Recommendations for Districts to Support Students' Social-Emotional Needs

Recommendation	Strategies and Resources
Be transparent and communicative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determine where announcements will be made, keeping in mind where families in your district will most likely be able to easily access information. ▪ Deliver consistent, proactive messages with resources for families to access at home.
Provide easy avenues for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider all the home languages served in your district. Click here for multi-lingual resources related to COVID-19.
Promote strong community learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gather data from online staff and family surveys to determine what efforts are most beneficial in supporting students' social-emotional needs and where gaps still exist. ▪ Communicate with parents and caregivers suggested steps for supporting students during the COVID-19 crisis. Click here and here for examples of resources to support families.
Serve as nurturing leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider the emotional needs and challenges of both students and the adults who are directly supporting the students. Click here for strategies to support staff working with students.

Source: Multiple⁴

There are several factors that can affect how prolonged stress as a result of a crisis or natural disaster impact students' social-emotional wellness.⁵ Among these factors is the student's ability to positively cope with their feelings of stress and anxiety.⁶ The visual below offers resources districts can draw from to help support students' social-emotional needs in a distance-learning environment.

Virtual Resources for Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Needs

Free toolkit for coping with anxiety around COVID-19

Source: Shine partnering with Mental Health America

RULER community strategies for managing anxiety around COVID-19

Source: Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

Practical strategies for a trauma-informed approach to distance learning

Source: Teaching Tolerance

Strategies for using tele-health to support students and families during COVID-19

Source: ChildTrends

Resources for school counselors supporting students during COVID-19

Source: American School Counselor Association

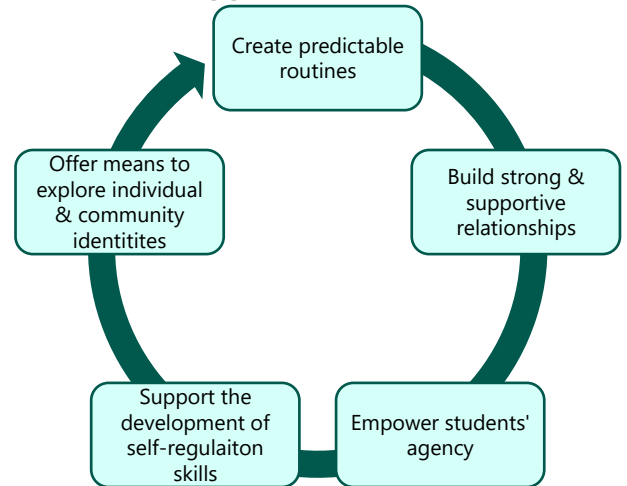
The Role of School Staff

In this unprecedented time, districts must rely on school staff, including teachers, administrators, and school counseling staff, to deliver social-emotional support to students using a distance/virtual model.

Social support can reduce negative mental health effects of a crisis for adolescents.⁷ However, providing such social support virtually can be challenging. Below are some considerations for creating supportive virtual spaces for students:⁸

- ✓ **Build a welcoming and trusting environment** for students; regular communication is key.
- ✓ **Create caring online environments;** invite students to share concerns through messages, email or reflections.
- ✓ **Provide resources** that students can access when the instructor is unavailable.
- ✓ **Help students set a regular study schedule** and provide time estimates for assignments.
- ✓ **Reach out to disengaged students;** seek to discover underlying challenges.

Key Trauma-Informed Social-Emotional Support Practices



Source: Transforming Education⁴

Recommendations for Supporting School Counselors

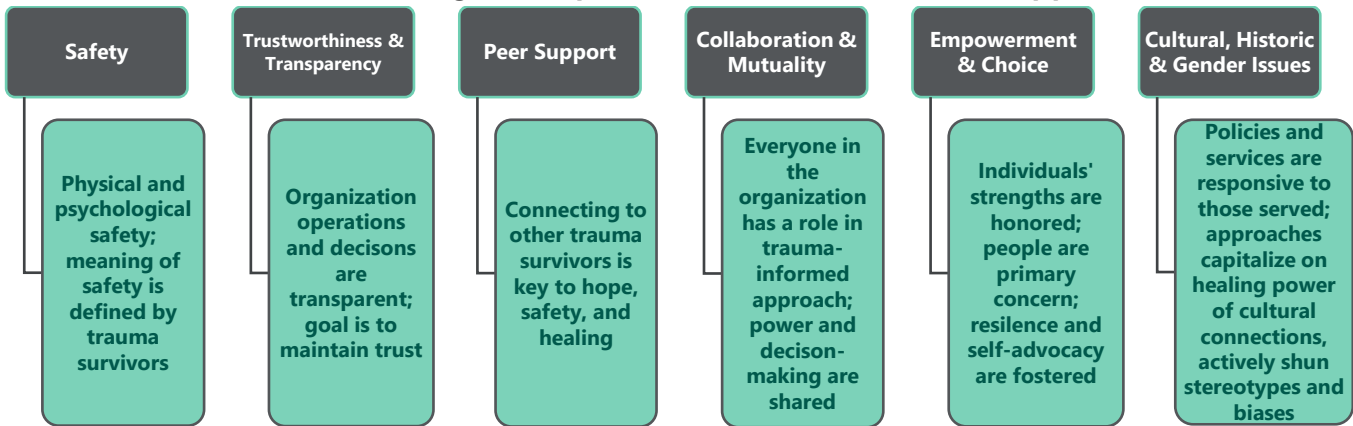
RECOMMENDATION	STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES
Plan for communication and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a team including an administrator, school counselor, lead teacher, school social worker, school psychologist, and school nurse to lead and coordinate efforts to continue school counseling services during the shutdown. ▪ Communicate clearly through district messaging channels where students and families can connect to a school counselor if needed. ▪ Consider communication options through email, phone, or online platforms.
Understand key policies, including COVID-19 policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review with counselors the school and district policies for online services/activities, accessing student information, and using online platforms. ▪ Click here for updated guidance on HIPPA regulations related to tele-health and COVID-19.
Communicate emergency and non-emergency procedures for accessing counseling services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organize virtual support groups for students, staff, and caregivers. ▪ Post district mental health support access information as well as national mental health hotline information.
Plan for unique considerations inherent in virtual/distance school counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop methods to educate students on ways to participate in the student-counselor relationship through virtual/distance school counseling. ▪ Click here for guidelines and recommendations for establishing effective virtual school counseling programs. ▪ Click here to access the U.S. Department of Education's resources related to student confidentiality, distance learning, and COVID-19.
Update and promote school counseling website frequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use school/district social media and other communication platforms to reach all groups. ▪ Consider all the home languages served in the district.

Source: American School Counselor Association⁹ and Weissbecker et al.¹⁰

Post-Disaster Approaches and Tips

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that organizations implement a trauma-informed approach when working with communities during public health emergencies.¹¹ Click [here](#) to learn more about these principles; click [here](#) for detailed information about how these principles can be used to guide school districts' approach to supporting students' social-emotional needs in response to trauma.

6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹² and SAMHSA¹³

For most districts, the challenges of supporting students' social-emotional needs using a distance/virtual model are unparalleled. However, by looking at the efforts and innovative approaches used by schools around the world in response to a variety of traumatic events, districts can find creative strategies to support students' social-emotional needs during prolonged school closures.

Despite the differences in the types of crises experienced by the schools highlighted in the chart below, certain aspects of student support to a crisis are consistent: **creating normalcy for students and supporting them through relationship-centered outreach.** Hence, these actions should form the basis of districts' response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-Disaster Tips for Districts

School	Colorado Academy	Texas Schools	New Zealand Schools
Context for Response	COVID-19 School Closure	Post-Hurricane Disasters	Post-Earthquake, Christchurch
Student-Focused Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online programming focuses on schedule and structure Counselors hold virtual office hours for students Virtual yoga and athletic exercises for students each day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for students to practice positive coping strategies using art, drama, and music Incorporate breathing exercises and relaxation strategies into class time Establish a morning routine that includes regular check-ins with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize communication and maintaining connections between schools and students Create a sense of belonging for students Develop relationships between students and teachers, school administration and families to create trust Proactively prepare for post-traumatic stress issues such as substance abuse in students or families, depression, anxiety, etc.

Source: Multiple¹⁴

Endnotes

- ¹ Bartlett, J.D., J. Griffin, and D. Thomson. "Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Child Trends*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- ² Text box information copied verbatim from Slade, S. "A Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Approach to Responding to Health Crises." ASCD Inservice, March 13, 2020. <https://inservice.ascd.org/a-whole-school-whole-community-whole-child-approach-to-responding-to-health-crises/>
- ³ Madrid, P.A. et al. "Challenges in Meeting Immediate Emotional Needs: Short-Term Impact of a Major Disaster on Children's Mental Health: Building Resiliency in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina." *Pediatrics*, 117: Supplement 4, May 1, 2006. https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/Supplement_4/S448
- ⁴ Davis, K.T. "A Coronavirus Outreach Plan: 5 Steps for District Leaders - Education Week." *Education Week*, March 5, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/03/05/a-coronavirus-outreach-plan-5-steps-for.html?r=12705065&cmp=eml-enl-eu-news2&M=59061207&U=41685&UUID=c1fa111e88cc42ce2860c55a05eaae09> [2] Slade, Op. cit.
- ⁵ Weissbecker, I. et al. "Psychological and Physiological Correlates of Stress in Children Exposed to Disaster: Current Research and Recommendations for Intervention." *Children, Youth and Environments*, 18:1, 2008.
- ⁶ Innemee, L. "Supporting Students Affected by Trauma." Project HOPE-Virginia Department of Education, July 2015. <https://education.wm.edu/centers/hope/publications/infobriefs/documents/Trauma%20Brief.pdf>
- ⁷ Weissbecker et al., Op. cit.
- ⁸ Shi, T. and E. McBrien. "Creating a Supportive Online Learning Environment with Emotional Design." OLC, December 12, 2019. <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/creating-a-supportive-online-learning-environment-with-emotional-design/>
- ⁹ Chart contents copied verbatim with some adaptations from "Planning for Virtual/Distance School Counseling During an Emergency Shutdown." American School Counselor Association (ASCA). <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/school-shutdowns>
- ¹⁰ Weissbecker et al., Op. cit.
- ¹¹ "Infographic: 6 Guiding Principles to A Trauma-Informed Approach | CDC." December 19, 2018. https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. "SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma Informed Approach." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014.
- ¹⁴ Mann, M. "NAIS - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Schools." National Association of Independent Schools, March 30, 2020. <https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/additional-covid-19-guidance-for-schools/#HolisticOnlineStrategy> [2] "SupportingStudentsCopingwPost-DisasterTraumaFINAL.Pdf." <https://www.texasappleseed.org/sites/default/files/SupportingStudentsCopingwPost-DisasterTraumaFINAL.pdf> [3] Fletcher, J. and K. Nicholas. "What Can School Principals Do to Support Students and Their Learning During and After Natural Disasters?" *Educational Review*, 68:3, 2016.