

- Dr. Koenen: Introduction to forum series
- Koenen group resources are public access
- Email Shaili Jha sjha@hsph.harvard.edu for access to the google drive
- Today's slides and resources referenced will also be available
- Permission to use the information as helpful
- Sessions are being recorded

Mindful Parenting in Uncertain Times

Managing Family Communications
About the Coronavirus and
Supporting Children

Archana Basu, PhD



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN

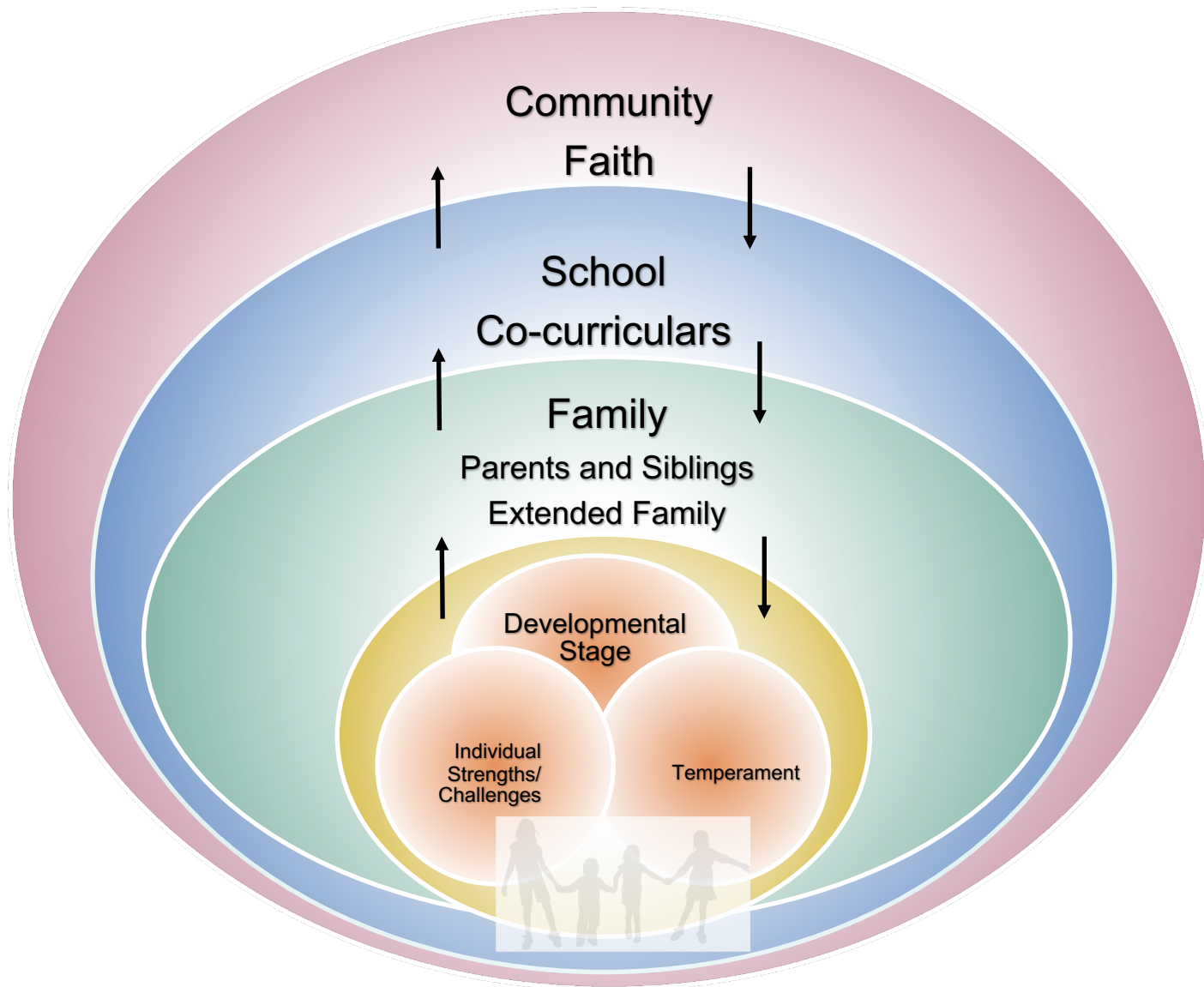
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



MassGeneral Hospital
for Children

1. Development occurs within interconnected systems.
 - Parents / consistent caregivers the most influential
2. Communication is an important way of supporting children.
3. Parental self-care is central to cope and support.
 - Mindfulness

Development within interconnected systems



Development Occurs within a Layered Context

- Children learn to make sense of their experiences in interactions within these systems and their closest relationships
- Reliable responsive support is protective in facing challenges.
- Research suggests that supporting parents enhances children's resilience.

Communication

- Communication plays an important role in supporting children.
 - Informational communication
 - Emotional communication
- See handout on Koenen drive for more information, specific examples by age group/ developmental stage.

Communication

- Children talk to parents when they believe the parent is listening.
- They talk when they believe the parent is open to new information.
- In these conversations, they learn the words to use to make sense of their own experiences.

Adapted from Paula Rauch MD

Communication

- Age-appropriate factual communication.
 - E.g, germs, virus, coronavirus...
- Helps children make sense of what they are experiencing or observing.
- Engage in conversation and listen.
 - What questions are on their mind
 - *Their* concerns

Communication

- Managing media and internet exposure.
- Staying informed without getting overwhelmed.
- School age children/ adolescents:
 - Help identify trusted sources
 - Protect healthy curiosity
 - Model healthy media use habits
 - Provide healthy choices (e.g., watching a favorite family movie together, content on TedED)

Communication

- Support your child in avoiding stereotyping
 - “Sometimes people cope with their own worry by blaming others.”
 - Unintended negative consequences *for everyone*.
 - E.g., people may be less likely to seek medical help if they fear being bullied or judged for being sick.

Communication

Attend to your child's emotions

- Acknowledge and validate their feelings.
- Provide *realistic* assurance.

- Key goal: Help kids not be alone with their worries.

Communication

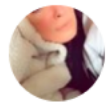
Explore how *your* child is responding

- Different children respond differently to the same information.
- Age, personality...
- Experiencing extra worries can affect how they are thinking and feeling, motivation, and you may notice behavioral changes

Mindful Parenting

- Supporting your children starts with supporting yourself
- May seem paradoxical but attending to yourself, supports your loved ones.

Parenting: we are all making it up as we go



Vision O'Bored 

@VisionBored1



Son: Can I have some?

Me, mouth full of cheesecake: It's really spicy you won't like it.

♡ 6,397 10:43 PM - Jan 5, 2020



Mindful Parenting

- You have a lot of experience



- ...and you know your child best.
 - What has worked for your child or your family before?

Mindful Parenting

- We have been here before in some ways..
- You know the weather prediction
 - Many many (many) rainy days
- Regulate and plan, or panic: both effortful, but only one actually helps



Mindful Parenting

- Help kids focus on they can control.
 - Choosing and building routines (including flex time)
 - Hygiene behaviors
- Plan for regular replenishment to build emotional stamina.
 - Experiences that make you feel more upbeat
 - Activities that help calm down
- Balancing flexibility and routines.
 - Maintaining some routines
 - Children feel some sense of stability when other aspects of life feel out of control

Mindful Parenting

- Pick your positive coping strategies
 - Get active while practicing physical distancing
 - Stay socially/ emotionally connected (through technology)
 - Prioritize sleep
 - Do something good for someone else
 - Treat yourselves
 - Read or play together
 - Bring out favorite books, games from the past that are associated with comfort.....

Mindful Parenting

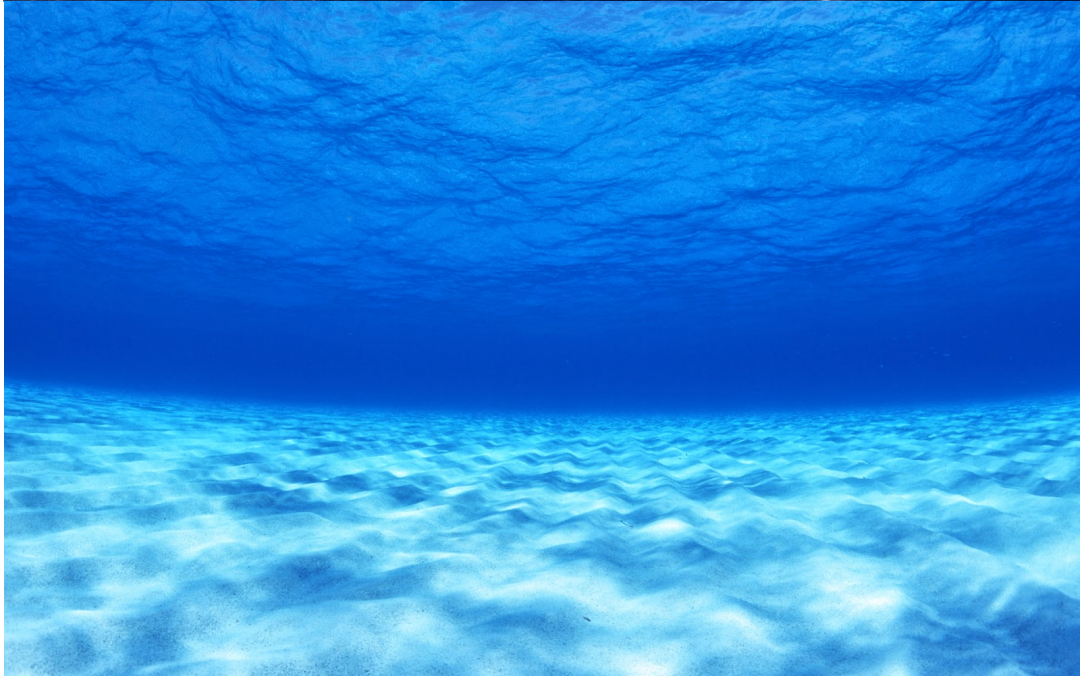
- Resilience as a process
- Build consistent practices that enhance capacity *to cope and to support*

Mindful Parenting

- Heads up: you are not going to get it right each time...
 - Forgive yourself
 - Returning to repair *is* the key
 - Bazillion interactions = bazillion opportunities
 - You are not going to know all the answers but you can model how to try and figure it out
 - Your mistakes are teachable moments

Mindful Parenting

- Mindfulness – intentionally bringing your awareness to your experience without judgment.
- Regular practice
- Promotes emotional awareness
- Respond not react
- Plenty of ideas online for adults, age-specific ideas for children, and families.



Mindful Parenting

Are we there yet?: Coping with long term uncertainty

- Practice consciously shifting your focus
 - *Why to What now and How*

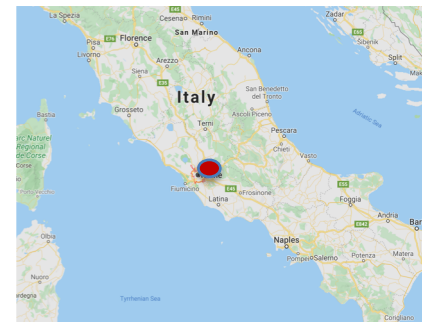
Be intentional in what you choose to attend to...

Making Lemonade...

- Physical distancing is easier in large open spaces...****
- “My older son has taken on home schooling the younger one...”
- “I have known my husband for nearly 20 years... and just learned that he is confused about the rules for Rock Paper Scissors!”
- “I am awesome at practicing social distancing...within my family!” – Student home from college

Building Resilience As a Community

- Unique situations require creative problem solving
- *“the singing is at 6 PM every night in Italy off the balconies and then at noon every day we go on the balconies to clap for all the medical people..” ~ Sophia C.,*



Acknowledgements

- Family
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- MGH
 - Nancy Rotter, PhD, Deborah Friedman, PhD
 - Paula Rauch MD, Cynthia Moore PhD, MGH Parenting At a Challenging Time Program.
- Carolyn Dayton PhD, Wayne State University

1-minute **Mindfulness** practice
emphasizing **Gratitude**

References and Resources

MGH for Children:

- [How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus](#)

MGH [Parenting At a Challenging Time](#) Resources

- [Community Crises and Disasters: A Parent's Guide to Talking with Children of All Ages](#)
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SAMHSA

- [Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- [Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- [Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions and Answers: Coronavirus Disease-2019 \(COVID-19\) and Children](#)
- [Get Your Household Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)

National Association of School Psychologists

- [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)

Infants and toddlers (under age 3)

- Can sense a caregiver's emotional state
- More fussy than usual, or show changes in their sleep or feeding patterns.
- Maintain routines and consistency in caregivers and their environment.
- Familiarity provides a sense of security.
- Offer more physical comfort and soothing.

Preschoolers (3 - 5 years)

- Understand basic ideas about germs and being sick.
- Brief factual explanations.
- Maintain routines. Focus on hygiene behaviors (e.g., washing hands while counting to 20, singing “Happy Birthday” twice through).
- Limit television and online information.
- Encourage normal play and reading. Preschoolers use play to understand and organize their feelings.
- Let your child know you are there to keep them safe.
- Offer more physical comfort and soothing.

School age children (ages 6-12)

- Many more questions.
- Keep it simple and factual.
- Give opportunities to explore feelings and ask questions.
- Reassure your child that you and their school are doing what is best to keep them safe.
- Supervise television and media use. Be available to answer questions that come up.

Adolescents (age 13 or older)

- Get information through school, friends, social media, online sources, or television.
- Typical to seek other sources of information or support, from friends, rather than parents.
- Listen to Learn and Learn to listen.
- Watch, read, and discuss information together.
- Correct misconceptions.

Building Resilience As a Community

- “Why isn’t anyone coming to my house?”
- Connect as a Community
 - Most current solutions involve technology
 - Digital access (and other) disparities