Identifying Stress and Trauma

Most students returning this fall may show at least some signs of stress or trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures and economic disruptions. But in remote and socially distanced classrooms, it may be more difficult to spot behavioral changes, and experts say even brief conversations with parents can give educators better insight into students’ needs.

The following questions are adapted from discussions with trauma experts and protocols from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

Questions for Parents During Video Conferencing

These can be asked in passing for parents sitting in on a child’s online lessons or in separate parent-only online meetings.

Q: How is your child doing this morning? (Regular check-ins with parents can help set a baseline for the student’s behavior when the teacher has not met the student in person.)

Q: Is there anything you/your child have concerns about?

Q: Do you see differences in how your child behaves/focuses at home and during remote lessons?
Private Survey for Parents

☐ My child has been exposed to potentially traumatic experiences before/during the pandemic.

☐ My child has known someone who has gotten sick or died during the pandemic.

☐ Our family has experienced food, housing, or financial instability during the pandemic.

☐ My child has shown more difficulty controlling his/her feelings, or becomes sad, angry, or scared.

☐ My child has trouble controlling behaviors.

☐ My child often exhibits significant changes in activity level, appearing overactive or agitated sometimes and then calmer or even quite slowed down at other times.

☐ My child has trouble remembering, concentrating, and/or focusing. He/she sometimes appears “spacey.”

☐ My child has problems with eating, sleeping, and/or complains about physical symptoms even though doctors find nothing physically wrong to explain these symptoms.

☐ My child has difficulties in forming and sustaining relationships with other children and adults.

☐ My child seems to need and seek out more stimulation than other children and/or can be easily distracted by noises, sounds, movements, and other changes in the environment.

☐ My child has many mental health diagnoses but none of them quite seem to explain his/her problems.

☐ My child is taking medication (or many medications) for these diagnoses but the medicines are not helping.