

Transcript | Families and COVID-19: A KET Forum

Renee Shaw:

Over the last few weeks, life has changed a great deal for all of us. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, families across Kentucky have been grappling with a new reality, perhaps wondering how to balance work, childcare, and self-care needs. Extended school closures have moved academics from the classroom to the living room, leaving caregivers to adjust.

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for joining us. I'm Renee Shaw. In an effort to better understand what families are facing and to offer resources that may help caregivers, we've assembled a panel of experts to guide us over the next hour. Joining us in the Lexington studio is Dr. Allen Brenzel, medical director of the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health Development and Intellectual Disabilities, and Kevin Brown, interim commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education. From our Frankfort studio, Dr. Connie White, deputy commissioner for clinical services with the Kentucky Department for Public Health. Joining the conversation from KET's downtown Louisville studio, Jean Schumm, founder and president of Operation Parent, a parent-driven organization providing support resources for parents and caregivers, and joining us via Skype is Eamonn Fitzgerald, family, community, early childhood district liaison for Fayette County Public Schools. We thank you all for joining us.

We invite your questions and comments tonight. We want you to join the conversation by giving us a call at 1-800-494-7605. You can also send an email to ketforum@KET.org, or you can reach out to us on Twitter @KET.

Well, thank you to our Lexington guests. We'll start with you, Commissioner Brown, first. We have some breaking news today, and we know that Governor Andy Beshear met via phone conference with the superintendents and have advised what? That this would be the end of no in-person instruction going forward. Rely on those nontraditional instruction opportunities. Is that correct?

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

He did. This is the fifth time, Renee, that the governor has taken the time to meet with the superintendents using a conference call. This time, we used Microsoft Teams to hear from the governor. We really appreciate him sharing that information with us, and he, of course, shared with the superintendents the same information that was shared later at the press conference about that it is his recommendation and the recommendation of Kentucky's public health experts and also following in line with the recent CDC guidance and the guidance issued by the White House in the various phases of reopening the country that we do see in person or not have in-person classes for the remainder of the school year, the 2019-20 school year.

Renee Shaw:

That was expected. Was it not?

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

It was expected. There was a glimmer of hope. The last time the governor met with the superintendents, he indicated there was a small chance we could have some type of in-person classes or at least maybe a week or so that we could have senior activities, and he wanted to keep that hope alive. We've been making the decisions in Kentucky and the governor using the public health experts in increments using data and using science, and some other states doing it a little different way, but I think this has been good for us because we've been able to advise districts as we move along and have the data.

Unfortunately, our worst fears are realized in that we're not going to be able to finish the year in in-person classes, but I will state this. The first time the governor met with me in his office when this started in that week of March, he used the term we're closing schools to in-person classes, and that's not a phrase that's in the school laws, and that was new to me, but I'm so glad he used that phrase because our school has been closed to in-person classes and buildings have been closed, but school has still been going, and it will continue to go until the districts meet 1,062 hours this year of NTI instruction.

Renee Shaw:

Many people are wondering about the grading. We know that testing was off for this time, so what will the grades be? Will they be pass/fail? What's been decided there.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

That's a local district decision. The state law gives local Boards of Education and then also gives the school-based decision making council authority in that area, and so local districts and school decision making councils. Teachers and principals will be making that decision on how those grading options will be taken care of.

Renee Shaw:

We know that high school seniors have got to be feeling a lot of different things going on right now, that they are missing out on those rites of passage to prom, to possibly in-person graduation, but you have a student advisory council who, with the KDE and the commissioner, that met last week and discussed maybe some options to be considered.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

I do have that council. It's a great council. It's the only advisory council I've met with since the pandemic started. I will be meeting with all the other advisory councils in the coming weeks. I've met with this student advisory council two times. They are perhaps the toughest advisory council on me in that they are very frank, and we want them to be frank, but they are very concerned, of course, about end-of-year activities and disappointed, but they were actually giving us, the adults, a little advice on making sure we had routines in place to handle telecommuting because they have routines in place-

Renee Shaw:

Sure.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

... dealing with nontraditional instruction, but one of the ideas the students shared, they would really like the possibility of an in-person graduation and perhaps deferring that as long as necessary, but we heard from the governor today that even deferring a graduation ceremonies into late summer or early fall could still present problems depending on what phase of recovery we are in, so we're still encouraging districts to look at other options, virtual options, that may be available. The governor talked today about potential drive-in or drive-through option.

Renee Shaw:

I'm trying to imagine how that would work, actually.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

It could be similar to the way some church services have handled it with the restrictions that the governor emphasized on those, but the student advisory council thought that was the least popular option, and it may be that's a generational difference, but we're going to be working with schools and districts to come up with additional ideas. I believe Henderson County had a prom this past weekend using the local radio station.

Renee Shaw:

They're getting real creative, these kids.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

They are getting very creative, and that is not the same as a regular prom, but that prom will obviously still be remembered by those students.

Renee Shaw:

Just probably more so. You can think about the good that kind of erupted from this situation. We know there has been an intense focus on NTI, and that's become a lexicon that the rest of us have learned, and maybe it hadn't been familiar to many of us, non-traditional instruction, and I am wondering, with your advisory council, if seniors who hear a lot about that intense focus on NTI are thinking, "Well, what about our transition to college?" or for maybe an incoming freshman, what about our transitional needs? Is there a way to address those things?

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

That is weighing heavily on our students, and that actually was a concern that was brought up to me by Dr. Aaron Thompson with a Council on Postsecondary Education before the COVID-19 pandemic started. He had a listening tour, and he brought that up at a Council for Postsecondary Education meeting that he interviewed students currently in college, but they were reflecting back. They needed some more transition assistance in high school. That was already on our radar. It's going to be even more so now. We are flagging that for a followup by the department and our education partners to try to beef up the transition services when we get back into school, but also outreach to students right now. Guidance counselors and other mental health professionals, and other school officials are reaching out to students to assist them.

Renee Shaw:

We'll talk a little bit more about that later on. For kids who maybe are already disconnected from school just because they have maybe issues at home and other challenges, does online learning present possible another pitfall for them to fall further behind?

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

It could possibly, as a student disconnected in a traditional classroom is likely to be disconnected in a non-traditional environment. On the other hand, we are also seeing reports and then on social media and media on how teachers are performing outreach to students. A student that they may not call or email with in a non-traditional environment, they are now doing that. They are reaching out to those students. Kentucky has a 93% student participation rate in non-traditional instruction every year or around 93% every year. We have a 93% student participation rate right now from the initial data we've

been receiving back from school districts. That's still not where we need to be. There's a 7% there that are disconnected that we need to continue to reach, but teachers are trying very innovative ways and using multiple platforms to reach students.

Renee Shaw:

When we talk about non-traditional instruction, it really isn't just online. We know that there are educators who are delivering packets, who are coaching them over the phone, who are going to their homes, using those physical distance recommendations, really trying to meet kids where they are.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

They really are, and we use the term non-traditional instruction in Kentucky for a reason. We've never used virtual learning, even though virtual learning is a part of non-traditional instruction. In Kentucky, we always knew there would be students that don't have Internet access or limited Internet access, and so it's non-traditional instruction, and a teacher may be reaching out to some students using Google platforms or Microsoft Teams, but also maybe going to a student's house, talking to the student, using distancing while the student's on the porch. I saw a report this week of a teacher teaching through American sign language while the student was looking out the window.

Renee Shaw:

Oh, wow.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

Then, you have everything in between a virtual and that type of outreach.

Renee Shaw:

With school districts diving headlong into non-traditional instruction, students and educators alike have had to adjust to a new way of learning. Diane Hatchett, superintendent of Berea Independent School District, shared with me her district's approach to at-home learning.

Renee Shaw:

Dr. Hatchett, thank you so much for joining us. I appreciate your time this evening.

Diane Hatchett:

Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Renee Shaw:

Good. How is NTI going for you? We've talked a lot about how, and we've heard a lot about how, parents and kids and even educators are struggling with this new reality. How's it going in Berea?

Diane Hatchett:

Well, it's a challenge as you might expect, but we're taking this as an opportunity, an opportunity to reset education and how we do things for kids. For a lot of kids, it's an opportunity to stretch them, especially our high-achieving kids, to do more types of enrichment with them. For the students who struggle, it gives us opportunity to talk with them one on one and to personalize learning. We're working on it. It's a continuous improvement for us, but we're trying to meet all kids' needs.

Renee Shaw:

Some people may think that you just give one assignment and you dispatched that, and there's not a lot of individuality to it, but you're saying that you try to meet kids where they are, wherever they are, in their educational journey.

Diane Hatchett:

Yes. It's not a one-size-fits-all. It can't be. It has to be personalized to where the kids are and meet their needs. This is the perfect opportunity. When you're in the classroom, a lot of times, you got the test, and you have so much curriculum, you got your pacing guide, and you need to cover all this material. Well, with NTI, the way it is right now, you still have to cover things, but you can breathe a bit. The test is no longer part of what's going on. What it's about is meeting kids where they're at. At Berea Community Schools, we're about looking at kids holistically. We try to look at the whole child. We want to know how they're doing physically first, how they're doing emotionally, because you got to have Maslow's before you can have [inaudible 00:11:55]. Before kids can learn anything, they got to know you care. That's what we're focusing on first.

Renee Shaw:

Some people would think that in-home instruction and homeschooling, as many people are dealing with it now, wouldn't be as rigorous as that in-classroom setting. Is that true or false?

Diane Hatchett:

It's false. The kids are working. Teachers and students are working 10 times harder because it's constant. There's so much to take in. I mean, definitely, homeschool is not what everybody thinks it is.

Renee Shaw:

How do you get parents involved? I just see on social media, parents not venting, but voicing their frustrations with trying to balance it all, trying to deal with their work at home and their child's assignments. What advice and tips do you have for parents who find themselves kind of in this weird spot?

Diane Hatchett:

Well, they need to treat it like it's a schedule. Kids need structure. In the morning, they need to know what time they're going to eat, like they do in the school day. Make it like a normal school day and put aside a time of the day where they take a break, a time when they start their lesson. Give them 15 minutes here and there to stretch and relax, do some mindfulness activities. We have a website with parent tips where they can go to, and some of it is mindfulness because it's what we use in the classroom, but they need a structure and that will help the parents and the kids.

Renee Shaw:

Well, such good advice, Diane Hatchett. We appreciate your expertise, the time that you're taking, and the way that you're being so creative and meeting kids right where they are and families, as well. Thank you so much.

Diane Hatchett:

No problem. Thank you.

Renee Shaw:

You take good care and be well. Commissioner Brown, I want to go back to you to just maybe put a pin in the fact that these NTI days, they do count as hours of instruction, seven hours of instruction, so many districts will still get those 1,062 hours that's required.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

That's correct, and we announced the Education Continuation Plan today as a result of the governor's recommendation, and as part of that plan, we'll allow school districts, if they choose, to count every NTI day as a seven-hour day. Now, we know that an NTI day does not look the same as a traditional day, and the assignments that are sent for students to work on are not the same types of assignments. It's project-based learning, competency-based education. However, we're going to count those days as seven-hour days. That will enable some districts to shave a few days off their calendar.

For example, Jefferson County, they would be closing June 3rd. Under this Education Continuation Plan, they will reach their 1,062 hours, I believe, in late May. Other districts, for example, may close around May 15th, and they'll have their last student instruction day on May 12th. Part of that is done because we're hearing the fatigue. You're hearing about how this is a different kind of teaching. It's a different kind of work on behalf of the students, that are students that are performing, and it's a different type of expectation for parents, caregivers, and guardians. We know there's fatigue there, but we also believe we owe it to Kentucky's kids, that every kid has the equivalent of 1,060-

Kentucky's kids, that every kid has the equivalent of 1,062 hours. And we have a technology platform and we've been doing NTI in Kentucky, at least, some districts for 10 years, and so I think we're better positioned than most States to continue on.

Renee Shaw:

Well, many of Kentucky's social workers and family resource coordinators have seen firsthand over the last few weeks how school closures impact more than just academics and learning at home. Paula Hunter is the Family Resource Center Director for Nicholas County schools. I spoke with her earlier regarding how Family Resource and Youth Service Centers are helping students continue to receive critical services despite the school closures. Thank you, Ms. Paula Hunter, for joining us. We appreciate your time. For people who may not be familiar with your work, can you just give us a little a reader's digest of what you do and how maybe that's changed during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Paula Hunter:

Well, the Family Resource Center, this is our 30th year and one of the main things we do, we help alleviate any non-cognitive barriers to learning for our students. And we do that by doing projects through the year. We just have a different hodgepodge of things that we do and programs that we provide for our students.

Renee Shaw:

So what are they telling you? I'm sure they're missing you as much as you missing them. What are their needs right now?

Paula Hunter:

A lot of them need things like school supplies. And last week I went to take one a box of food and they saw I had a puzzle in my car. And she says, "What are you going to do with that puzzle, Ms. Hunter?"

And I said, "Well, honey, you can have that." And she was like, "We don't have an internet." And then I got to thinking, well, probably most of our students don't have internet. So when we get our food last week, we served over 7,000 meals. Our school system did. We put a puzzle in each family's basket so they would have something to do.

Renee Shaw:

Well, you don't think about when they're at school, these kids, so much of what they receive comes from the education community and that their homes may not have that online access and fun activities to kind of keep their brains still engaged. I'm sure that was really heartwarming for you.

Ms. Paula Hunter:

So when all of this started happening, people started calling and say, what can I do? What can we do? We don't have a hospital, we don't have a Walmart, we don't have a chain restaurant and our school is our largest employer. So the judge got with me, our county judge, he wanted to form some type of Team Nicholas County and have all of the numbers go through me because I knew all of the resources and where to refer our families that needed. So we've been providing our local fire department, we have like a small food bank we set up. One of my community partners came in, they've all come in and told me what we can do, what can we do, what can we do? And I had a community member make a large donation to help buy food for that food bank. So we've served 70 families right now.

Renee Shaw:

And people now may have some time on their hands where they can help you out and volunteer. What do you need help doing to help you provide the services you're providing?

Paula Hunter:

Well, it is our community and we've formed a site on Facebook also. And it's Team Nicholas County-COVID19 Community Support. I started it two days ago, and it has over 500 members now. And people will put comments like, I'm going to Walmart, if somebody needs something from Walmart. Or somebody on there said, I want to provide meals from our local restaurants for four of our families. I mean, everybody's working together and that's what it takes. The needs are on there and then the people who can provide the needs.

Renee Shaw:

Well, Ms. Hunter, we thank you so very much for all you're doing in Nicholas County. Truly, the big heart shows right through you, ma'am. And we're so appreciative of the work you're doing to help those residents.

Paula Hunter:

There was an elderly couple who didn't want to go out. And I said, "Would you happen to bring us some milkshake from the Dairy Queen?" So I did and dropped it on the porch? It was a porch stop.

Renee Shaw:

That's awesome. Ironically, we might become closer than we were before all of this happen. Even though we have to practice this physical distancing, maybe our hearts are going to be bound together a little tighter than they were before all of this happened, and that would be a good outcome.

Paula Hunter:

That would. Thank you.

Renee Shaw:

Well, certainly we've got some great folks all across this state who are on the front lines in so many ways, and our Family Resource and Youth Service Center coordinators and directors are among them. We want to remind you that you're watching Families and COVID-19 at KET Forum, and we invite your questions and comments tonight. We want you to join the conversation by calling 1-800-494-7605. You can send an email to ketforum@ket.org or you can reach out to us on Twitter at KET. LaToya Benberry is the Family Resource coordinator at Mc Nabb Elementary within the Paducah Independent School District. I was able to speak with her about some of the challenges facing her student population. Hi, Ms. Benberry, thank you so very much for joining us.

LaToya Benberry:

Thank you so much for having me.

Renee Shaw:

Are you doing well?

LaToya Benberry:

Doing as good as I can [inaudible 00:20:22].

Renee Shaw:

Doing as well as you can? So tell us about the work you do in the Paducah area for Mc Nabb Elementary in particular, in helping those kiddos and their families, not just during this really challenging time but throughout the year.

LaToya Benberry:

Sure. So I am a member of the FRYSC Family Resource Youth Service Center. So I serve my families at the Mc Nabb Elementary School. Any non-academic barriers that need to be addressed that's where I get called in. We create programming throughout the year. Any need that rises, we assist our families with finding resources in the community, linking our families to the community, just building the strength and working from the strengths of our families.

Renee Shaw:

What are some of the things specifically that you're helping to provide students and families right now?

LaToya Benberry:

So the biggest thing that we see are food and transportation. A lot of times here lately we've been going to deliver a lot of packets. Because times are so hard and straining on everyone, a lot of our families are staying with relatives. We're seeing a lot of coming together of families to help one another. Food, our food shelter, I mean, I'm sorry, our food kitchen recently the main one closed in the city for a couple of days, we really felt that. All of our pantries were empty. We drove around to see the state of them and then we got online and use social media to rally people up, please fill these pantries up. The city heard our cry and the city figured out a way to open that food kitchen back up.

Transportation has changed. So of course, there's a limit of how many people can ride on the bus at one time. And our families need to get to the resources that all of us are rushing out to get. So transportation and food I'd say are the biggest ones. But we've helped with finding fun activities for kids to do, online sending home things, passing out games, frisbees, anything to keep them busy, and to add a little bit of normalcy to life.

Renee Shaw:

And because we all as you know, we're all taking care of each other and trying to take care of ourselves, how difficult is it or more challenging knowing that you've got to keep those physical distances in mind and how do you make those adjustments?

LaToya Benberry:

It's extremely hard and riding on the bus to deliver food through the food services. You'll see those faces that you know and you've built relationships with all year. And the first instinct is to reach those hands out and hug and you know you can't do that. So doing bumps and sending messages via cards. It's really hard. Especially working alongside our family, our school employees because we're a team and we're pulling together in a whole new way. So there's some do want to celebrate with an embrace, or if someone's upset or sad about what we're looking at. It's a challenge, but we know that we have to do it for our health.

Renee Shaw:

You know, Commissioner Brown, we've got a really nice tweet. Lorna Royer, I hope I'm pronouncing your name right, Ms. Lorna, said that her daughter and her co teacher went to each student's house that they had not heard from. I mean, the level of dedication that educators we know they have, but now we're really seeing it in action.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

It's really unbelievable you. All you need to do is go to social media, you'll see that. You may even hear horns honking in your neighborhood and we've been having teacher parades just to connect to their students. Some communities have been putting teddy bears in their window so students have something to look at if they're driving down the road. It's truly been amazing.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah. There is a question, one final question to you, Commissioner Brown, for the time being. This woman says her grandson is in the fourth grade, and she's afraid that he's falling behind, will he be able to go on to the fifth grade or will he have to stay in the fourth? It's hard to know.

Commissioner Kevin Brown:

I can't answer ... It's hard to know. Those are decisions that principals, teachers reach with consultation with each parent. And we're proceeding through NTI instruction with the belief that just like we would in a normal school year that students will progress to the next level, but those will be individual decisions. We're not reaching every child as we should in a normal school year. And let's say the school year had no snow days and no flu days and we were in person classes, we're still not reaching every child. We know that because we have gaps in the achievement of different student groups, and we're not going to unfortunately be able to reach every child where they need to be reached during NTI

instruction, but is the best platform we have. We're seeing a lot of innovative uses of it, and a lot of innovative ways that teachers are reaching out to their students.

Renee Shaw:

Right. A lot of people are under stress, Dr. Brenzel, educators, parents, caregivers, guardians, kids themselves who are just uncertain about this world and it's just moving so fast. Whether they're watching Governor Andy Beshear every day at five o'clock or they're watching other news about what's happening in our world. And have clients that you work with and try to coach them through these situations, what advice do you give all of us about how we can cope with the anxiety and stress that we're all feeling right now?

Dr. Allen Brenzel:

Thanks, Renee. And again, I just also want to acknowledge the incredible creativity and compassion and caring that our educators in school personnel are showing. But on the other end of that equation of NTI is families and parents. And the first bit of advice I would have is take a deep breath and give yourself an opportunity to not be perfect. So this is something we're all learning to do together. It's not something that there's always a right or wrong. And the first thing you need to do is realize and show some self-compassion. Because we know some of you are essential health workers or essential workers and you're out working each day and experiencing anxiety yourself about your exposures.

Some of you are adapting to working at home and the stresses that that can cause. Others of you might be unemployed and having financial stresses and worries about paying bills. And then we know one in five of you might be a single parent or have single have a single parent home. And so what I want you to know is that do the best you can. We are going to get through this, we're going to get through this together. This is temporary. Some of these things that your child may miss, they will make up. And you may have to just make decisions and set priorities about what you can and can't accomplish and then feel okay about it.

Renee Shaw:

Right. And maybe, I guess be honest with your child about their ... Parents are trying as hard as they can too, adjusting to all of these ever changing situations.

Dr. Allen Brenzel:

And kids look to us as adults, and they're going to do okay, if you do okay. And so my other advice is take care of yourself. Get some rest and exercise, get outside. If you can take some time for yourself. Some parents feel guilty about that when so much going on. But the better you do, the more you recharge your batteries, the more you'll be able to offer that calm reassurance and be present for them. And then again, there's going to be some advantages to this. This extra time together, have some fun, have some family time. Don't always be task-oriented. And really just don't always feel like you have to be a coach and a teacher and a disciplinarian. Sometimes you can be a parent and mom and dad.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah, and that's good roles to have. Dr. Connie White who is joining us in Frankfort? Thank you so much for being with us. You know, the physical distancing that's required of all of us right now is difficult for all of us. I'm just curious about what you would advise parents and caregivers to tell their young children who miss their playmates and play dates and even for teens, who are just itching to have some time

with their neighborhood friends, how would you coach parents through that conversation about what they should tell their kids?

Dr. Connie White:

Well, that six feet apart is so important because this virus is so easily spread from one person to the other. So that six feet distance is just critical for us to remember. I know that's hard to do with children. Children are so lovable and bounceable and all over each other and that that's why it is so important that we keep them apart. Finding ways to get their energy out is so important. I think we're very lucky that we're having this pandemic during April, as a Kentucky in April is my favorite time of the year. Think of what we would have missed if we'd been in our cars rushing back and forth to appointments and band rehearsals and been soccer practice and trying to get home to try to get the dinner made. But by doing this, we're actually having an opportunity to step back and enjoy the weather.

Driving up here to the Capitol to do this tonight, I saw people out walking their dogs and family having picnics in the grass, and some siblings racing up and down the Capitol steps, trying to get the wiggles out before bedtime this evening. Those are things that I think we can be thankful for that we have those opportunities. I love the commissioner talking about what we call in Frankfort, the neighborhood zoo, people putting those stuffed animals in the windows and the kids walking by and looking and pointing and talking about that. The chalk art that people are doing, that's a very low tech way to entertain the kids. I've seen children that are actually going door to door for some of the older ...

I've seen children that are actually going door to door for some of the older neighbors and doing musical concerts and actually singing and performing on people's front stoops. And not only does that give the person in the home a sense of wellbeing, but I think it's also very important for the children. And the 10 o'clock ringing of the bells, seeing kids out ringing bells at 10 o'clock as we all remember people who have not weathered this pandemic well. It gives the children a sense of purpose and that's what even little kids need, that sense of purpose.

The other end is the adolescents and the teenagers. They're a puzzle. They're supposed to be a puzzle, that's their job. We were puzzles to our parents. Our parents were puzzles to their parents. And I think we have to... as Frisky was saying, we have to work to their strength. What are your teams good at? If they're good at art, if they're good at writing, engage them in doing some things that they can send to some local nursing homes. These people are not having visitors now. This is an opportunity for people to start communicating in a very low tech way of pen and paper and bringing some joy to people.

I know of a group of mothers that got together and told their daughters they were going to have a conference call on Friday night, and there was a lot of grouching about that until they ended up making it a Zoom conference call when it was four hours of giggles. They're going to do another giggle night every week. So, I think if we give our kids opportunities that... A high school group that couldn't do their musical. And so with their band director they did that musical as a group, was absolutely amazing.

So I think the kids understand the world is turned upside down, everything's different and they're going to be some new norms. We're going to find some new norms. This advisory group of Commissioner Brown, they're going to find a new way to do a prom. They're going to find a new way to do graduation parties. And they're going to make these new norms up for us in ways that we, older people who have kind of set ways as to how things are supposed to happen, don't even have the ability to understand.

Renee Shaw:

Right. And I do want to ask you both. Dr. Brenzel, for parents who have children with special behavioral or developmental challenges, this will be a real challenging time for them? So what would you say for

parents who are in those situations who are used to having speech occupational therapies that may not be as readily available as perhaps they were?

Dr. Allen Brenzel:

Yeah, and it's quite true that kids who were vulnerable before might express some additional needs and that vulnerability may lead them to be more susceptible. But I think you've heard several times tonight: establish a routine, predictability. For those kids that's even more important. I'm in the routine of watching the governor every day at five o'clock and you know how he very much has structured that to be very consistent each night. I find it reassuring even though sometimes it's repetitive.

But for those kids we are going to have to look for ways to create that routine to structure things. And the kids that worry me most are the anxious kids because sometimes they may be worrying alone. And so, one of the messages I would like to get out there is talk to your kids, tell them, "Don't worry alone." We need to understand what have they heard, what have they seen and what have they understood and how have they understood it. Give them the opportunity to talk about those feelings in a very open and honest way. Even though that might cause anxiety for us to not know the right answer, just listening, just being present with them.

And then many of our providers, our physical therapist, our speech therapist have gotten very creative about delivering services through technology and tele-health. We're asking them not to see kids in their private offices right now, which is tough. But many of them, we've granted the flexibility to offer telehealth services. We've waived some of the licensure requirements and their boards have been very flexible. They've worked with state government in the cabinet. Don't assume you can't receive speech therapy or physical therapy or other behavior supports because we are providing those in new and creative ways.

Renee Shaw:

We do want to give some tips for parents and these come from PBS NewsHour that we'd like to share with you. There are 10 of them. One, make children feel safe. Give them facts and let them lead the discussion. Dr. Brenzel was just talking about that. Give them power and responsibility. Let them know what to expect. Empathy, empathy, empathy. Keep your child's developmental stage and temperament in mind. Try to maintain a normal routine. Model the behavior you want to see. Consider adjusting screen-time limits, and take care of yourself.

And then another set of really good advice that comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics. These are some good things to keep in mind as well. Simple reassurance. Remind children that researchers and doctors are learning as much as they can as quickly as they can about the virus and they want to keep everyone safe. Give your child control. It's a great time to remind your children of what they can do to help: washing their hands, coughing into a tissue or their sleeves, and getting enough sleep.

Watch signs for anxiety. Children may not have the words to express their worry as Dr. Brenzel well knows, but you may see signs of it and they may get cranky, a little bit more clingy, may have trouble sleeping or seem distracted. Keep the reassurance going and try to stick to your normal routines. Monitor their media. Keep your young children away from frightening images they may see on television, social media, computers, and talk with your kids about what they're seeing in the news and correct any misinformation or rumors that they may hear.

And then finally be a good role model. Modeling that proper hygiene. And as Mr. Rogers stated, when we all remember this phrase that when he was a young boy and he would see scary things on the news that his mom would say, "Just look for the helpers." You will always find people who were helping and

that gives all of us a great deal of reassurance. Dr. Brenzel, I know you would agree and even Connie would maybe want to chime in on that for just a moment.

Dr. Allen Brenzel:

Yes, and that issue of clinginess and regression, one of the things I want folks to know is that regression in a time of stress and anxiety is normal. It doesn't mean it's permanent. It doesn't mean they're going to not be able to go back to their previous level of functioning. And it's not something that folks should panic about. It's something that you should really come to expect that that's how we all manage stress and anxiety. And again, acknowledging those feelings in age appropriate ways. Younger kids, they engage in magical thinking. They may have some big misunderstandings about, this was somehow my fault or they closed school because I did something wrong. We need to understand that.

Middle school kids want to accomplish things, I think Dr. White talked about. Give them a task, let them accomplish. That mastery is part of their developmental level. And then teams. They're doing a lot of reading and research. One of the things you can model is if you don't know the answers, say, "Let's look this up together. Let's do some research. Let's go to the CDC website." So that's that modeling you were referring to where this is how we solve problems together and open that communication.

Renee Shaw:

Eamonn FitzGerald is with us now and he's the Family/Community Early Childhood District Liaison for Fayette County Public Schools. I just call it First 5 Lex. Thank you so much Eamonn for being with us. You are doing something really creative in the early childhood department. I've watched your Fridays with Fitz where they are so interactive and you give parents all kinds of tips, many of which we've shared tonight to kind of help console them and help them engage their very young children because we know that brain development is so key those very early years of life.

Eamonn FitzGerald:

Yes. Thanks Miss Renee. Yeah, that's one of the things we did. First 5 Lex is a community collaborative of all of these different agencies here in Lexington and Fayette County that really just want to focus on families prenatal all the way to age five. The director over the childcare council called and said, "Hey, why don't we try to do something on Friday nights for families to show them some of the resources that are out there, easy things we can do at home." So that's how it started. We basically hang out every Friday from my couch and just give activities and we bring on guests who can share resources. Katie was on there recently as was New Vista sharing tips, some social emotional tips for families and kids as well as the Explorium and other folks. So, it's a nice way to connect for families to give them kind of free and inexpensive ways that they can engage with their kids.

Renee Shaw:

I love that you have, in the back we can see it when we got a single shot of a view that play equals learning. And I want you to, do you have the packing peanuts demonstration near you because I really want you to show that. Do you have that nearby?

Eamonn FitzGerald:

I do, I do. So this is an activity that we came up with. We actually kind of got the idea from PBS Kids in Ruff Ruffman. It was building a structure. So my eight-year-old daughter was learning words like stability and structure and what things need when you're building something. So we had packing peanuts and we

had toothpicks. Her task, I wrote down two challenges for her; one was to build the tallest freestanding structure and then the next was to build a structure that's wider at the top than it was at the bottom.

So that's what she did where my two-year-old, he was just kind of sorting and counting the packing peanuts, working on fine motor skills, picking him up from this thing and putting it over here. We want to focus on kind of one activity that we can, like people spoke before, individualizing it for each kid. That way we don't have to worry about doing multiple activities for multiple kids. We have one activity with different kind of learning outcomes for each.

Renee Shaw:

So Eamonn, can you walk me through in 30 seconds what a typical day in the Eamonn FitzGerald household looks like.

Eamonn FitzGerald:

Sure. Some days we run on a one or two hours, no delay. But we do stick to a general schedule. Like everybody mentioned, we wake up, we have breakfast, we actually bought a giant bag of bird seed and every day, rain or shine, we go down to a nearby creek by our house to feed the ducks and the squirrels. And so, that's something nice for us to just kind of do. Regardless of the weather, we make sure that we're doing that together. And that's also some extra outside time that we have. My kids have kind of got to see snapping turtles, little fish and chipmunks that they generally wouldn't get to see throughout their normal day.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah, that's great. Eamonn, hang in there with us. We may come back to you.

Eamonn FitzGerald:

Thank you.

Renee Shaw:

We really appreciate all your show intel because it's really fun to watch and all the creative ways that you're helping your kids learning and you're helping the rest of us learn by the way. So thank you so much. We just want to emphasize a few key points here about how to make a new home routine. And Eamonn has touched on some of them. You've heard our other panelists discuss them today too. Set a school day schedule. You may want not one to two hours, no delay, but that's okay.

Schedule two or three times a day to go outside or go do an indoor physical activity like Freeze Tag, Simon Says, or Jumping Jacks, and set aside quiet time as well. Set scheduled meal times and snack times. Consider your needs as a parent, especially if you're working from home. And plan a routine that you can stick to. That continuity and consistency is so important for all of us really. And so, we hope that those ideas will help us all.

Dr. Brenzel and Dr. White as well, we do want to get back to maybe talking about a couple of things about vulnerable families and those who are dealing with substance use. I want to go now to Jean Schumm who is the founder and president of Operation Parent. It's a parent-driven organization providing support resources for parents and caregivers of teens and preteens. So you really get in that interesting age group. Jean, thank you so much for being with us.

Jean Schumm:

My pleasure.

Renee Shaw:

You have done a lot to help in the areas of mental health and substance abuse and use and we've talked to you on many occasions about your work in helping parents navigate those waters. And we think at a time like this, if those families are already fragile, what compounding factor that this COVID-19 outbreak could be for them that those other issues don't go away just because you have a pandemic. Can you talk to us about how you really navigate all of those circumstances?

Jean Schumm:

Well, the first thing we would tell parents is that you can do this, you can get through this, you are the number one influence in the life of your child and you are not alone. Most of the families that we talk to on a regular basis all have children at home that had some vulnerability. Often it's substance abuse and mental health. So, our parents are not alone and what we'd like to do at Operation Parent is to encourage our parents and remind them that they are the leader of the home, that they have a lot of power, that they set the schedule, that they set the tone for the family, they set the values and the beliefs so there's no need to feel hopeless even with these other challenges that they face.

I know you mentioned that these challenges could get worse right now during the pandemic, but I would actually make the argument that maybe right now is a time when these challenges could finally be addressed in the home with parents and kids together. Parents not traveling. There is more togetherness for sure under the roof. But I think we have a unique opportunity here and if we can encourage parents to lean into their role and if there's a way for us to equip them with the information they need, where they have the confidence to initiate some courageous conversations, we might really get at the root of where this substance abuse, where these mental health issues are coming from.

Renee Shaw:

You had a webinar recently where you discuss this issue of anxiety among teens and others. Can you give us a couple of those takeaways pretty quickly?

Jean Schumm:

Oh, I sure can. The girl was great that led it. She certainly encouraged parents to ask your teen, "How can I support you?" Don't assume you know the best ways to help them. Ask them how I can help you. Also to identify the controllables with your teen. What's still within their control? And there are a lot of things that together you can come up with a list so they don't feel like...

Things that at together you can come up with a list, so they don't feel like the rug has been yanked out from under their feet. Also, goal setting is so important right now with our teens. They need to know that progress is being made, whether it's with their fitness, with their health, with their schooling. Set weekly and monthly goals so they can see a progression. Service to others is critical. It's very easy to get depressed when we become self absorbed. But kids, teens especially, they need to feel needed. They need to know they make a difference. So help them find ways to serve other people. And finally, I would just say, start a gratitude journal. Research has actually shown that gratitude can help depression by 30 to 35% so there are a lot of things we still need to be grateful for, and we just need to focus on the right things right now.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah, good advice, Jean Schumm, thank you. We've all become familiar with the serious health risk associated with COVID-19. Unfortunately with extended time at home and with an environment of increased stressors, some of Kentucky's children have had to face an entirely different danger altogether. Janna Estep Jordan, Director Of Operations and Prevention Education for Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky, spoke with me earlier concerning the unfortunate reality some children face while at home. Janna, thank you so much for your time. We appreciate it being able to connect with you. Do you fear that there is a spike of child abuse cases during this very stressful time for parents and caregivers, and is there any research that suggests that during these high stress times when there's lots of concerns and even illness, that there is an increase in child abuse?

Janna Estep Jordan:

Well we are hearing anecdotal stories from across the state, and seeing various reports where reports have gone down. Historically, we know that when there are natural disasters, when we've had economic instability, and high stressors that child maltreatment has increased. We've even seen some instances like in 2009, when we had economic instability that child fatalities and near fatalities increased during that time as well.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah. Our recent PBS News Hour Report talked about this very issue. And it revealed that child experts say there are three conditions that they are really concerned about, and that's disrupted routines, job loss, and then children being isolated from those who care. Can you expound on those and maybe even perhaps add your own?

Janna Estep Jordan:

Yes. In times of distress, we want families and children to feel as much of in control of their situation as possible, which is why those routines are so important and so critical for families and children. I think that one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that each family might need to have a different routine. We can provide them with samples, but it needs to be what works for them and puts them in the driver's seat. And we need to ensure that those routines include things like getting up, maintaining proper hygiene, as well as having an appropriate amount of academic time for kids.

We don't want to have families under this unrealistic expectation that their child needs to be conducting academic work all day long. It just needs to be a few hours. But within that daily routine, we want to make sure that they're getting outside, they're moving, that they're enjoying each other as a family, especially during times like this.

I think the other thing that you mentioned was the job loss, which ties directly to economic instability. We know when there is any stressor on a family in a home that it can increase their inability to have patience, to be able to respond to the needs within their household. Especially times like right now, when we're learning how to homeschool our kids and deal with the technology that they have going on.

And then finally, I think that one of the biggest, most important pieces of this is that social connection component. We know that especially teenagers, they thrive on those social connections for their wellbeing. So the more that we can do to connect with families and to connect with kids, whether it's through a text message, or a phone call or through virtual means like we're using today, we know that those connections can help improve moods as well as their feelings that I'm connected to the world around me, and it helps them feel in control of their situation.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah. And finally, just really quickly, Janna, we all have a responsibility to report a suspected incidence of child abuse, right? That's by law. And so if we felt like a child may have been in danger before the pandemic, and may not be able to have had contact with that child, what can we do at this time?

Janna Estep Jordan:

I think that first step is reaching out to families, checking on families, trying to get your eyes on them if you can. And if you have any suspicion that a child is being physically abused, emotionally abused, sexually abused, we are all mandated reporters in the state of Kentucky to make that report. And by Kentucky law, anybody can call the Child Abuse Reporting Hotline at 1-877-KYSAFE1, or contact their local law enforcement. If you feel that a child or a family is in immediate danger, please dial 9-1-1.

Renee Shaw:

Well, good advice for us to end on. Thank you Janna for all that you do with Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky. We so appreciate the organization and your time this evening. We wish you continued health.

Janna Estep Jordan:

Thank you so much.

Renee Shaw:

Yes. I want to go now to Dr. Connie White again, because the one thing that we wanted to return to in our discussion about vulnerable populations during this time, are those who are dealing with substance use issues, who rely on Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, but there still is an outlet for them, to make sure that they connect in a meaningful way. Isn't that right?

Dr. Connie White:

Absolutely. If you go to your websites of either AA or NA, there's opportunity for meetings. I have a friend who started a meeting with ten people and it's grown. I talk to her yesterday. It's up to 42 members that are meeting every night as part of an AA group. Her daughter is doing an NA group where they are reaching out to people all over the state of Kentucky and actually all over the world, so there's great opportunity through virtual meetings, that keeps people in contact, that helps people to get that reassurance and that advice and that connectivity that they need to work with these issues.

Renee Shaw:

Dr Brenzel.

Dr. Brenzel:

Yeah. In regards to substance use disorder, we are very concerned that these additional stresses will either lead folks who are in early recovery to return to use, or prevent those in reaching that financial stability that is so important to sustain recovery. But the substance use treatment is part of the essential health services that are out there. Our providers are open for business.

It's actually an amazingly important and good time to come in and enter treatment if that's part of what you're experiencing, because you're more vulnerable to COVID if you're actively using. It decreases your immune system. It exposes you to risk of infection and we are really urging folks to maybe take this time to come in out of the cold, enter our treatment and recovery communities. And I am so impressed with the recovery, the vibrancy of the recovery community that is reaching out. People I know in recovery are

getting multiple texts throughout the day, checking on each other, having additional meetings, having additional opportunities and if you are out there and you are actively using, I think this could be a very important time for you to seek treatment.

Renee Shaw:

Yes. Jean Schumm, do you have anything to add along those lines about in terms of the resources that you try to connect parents and caregivers to under your work with operation parent?

Jean Schumm:

Well our resources are free, most of them, so we'd love to guide any of your viewers over to operationparent.org and they can click on the resource tab where they can watch some of the webinars we've had recently, and they can also view some videos that will help educate them on some of these really tough mental health and substance use issues. They've turned out to be great tools for parents.

Renee Shaw:

And we appreciate that. We know KET is here for parents to help ensure continues at home. During these school closures, KET's Senior Director of Education, Tonya Crum spoke with us regarding the resources that are available both on air and online.

Tonya Crum:

Well, for many decades KET has tried to provide support for families and for educators. And when the school closures began in the middle of March, it was our time to reach back out to schools and remind them of the resources that we have available through KET and PBS Learning Media.

So immediately we began pulling together a toolkit for families and for teachers that would give them the resources they need to be able to do school at home, to learn at home and to have fun at the same time. So we created the KET Learn at Home Toolkit, and it is divided into grade levels. And so for families who have children who are maybe pre-K through third grade, or families with fourth through eighth graders, or even high school kids, with lots of resources and activities that families can do at home.

It utilizes resources like PBS Kids, PBS Learning Media and the many shows that adults have come to love like Nova, Nature, History Detectives even. But we also began working with schools on their non traditional instruction. As you know, our families are working to help support teachers who offer this non traditional instruction through the Kentucky school districts. And KET is providing resources that are standards based and standards aligned, through PBS Learning Media.

It's an online repository of resources that really bring learning to life for kids, whether they're in school or at home. Then we also began with our broadcast schedule. So we know that many children in the state of Kentucky don't have access to the internet at home. And so we wanted to make learning come alive for them as well. And so we've taken our main channel on KET and we've offered a 10 hour educational broadcast schedule and again, broken into grade levels of pre-K through three, four through eight, and nine through twelve. So KET is just here to support families and teachers, and if there's anything we can do for them, we would love to hear from them and be able to support. Eamonn Fitzgerald, I want to go to you for just about 20 second comment.

We know that you're very familiar with the services at KET and you use those as you talked about a little earlier before, and I think we're going to try to go over to Connie White while we fix Eamonn really quick. Connie, I know you wanted to make a point about grandparents, real quickly.

Dr. Connie White:

Yes, we've talked about caregivers and children and anxiety. Please don't forget the grandparents. Make those phone calls or those FaceTime, so those grandparents and those grandchildren can continue to connect. That's critically important at this time.

Renee Shaw:

And we know that grandparents are becoming the primary caregivers for a lot of grandchildren. What is that 70 to 100,000 primary care givers are grandparents. So we need to keep that in mind as well. Yeah. Thank you Dr. White for making that point. Real quickly to you, commissioner Brown. Final parting words about what you hope kids will remember from this point on, given all this uncertainty.

Kevin Brown:

That the state pulled together, the education family, the entire state pulled together, family resource centers, cafeteria workers, school bus drivers, to ensure that they were educated, fed, and supported during this time. And that is the role of the Department of Education to continue to providing support to districts so they can educate, feed and support.

Renee Shaw:

Eamonn, real quickly, can you give me a 20 second takeaway that you'd like to leave viewers with tonight?

Eamonn FitzGerald:

Sure. This is the time where everybody wishes they had more time with their kids and you have this now. So hug your kids, have a dance party, make sure your belly laughing. Make sure you're learning about what your kids are interested in. I've learned way more about Webkinz and Shopkins and all different things than I ever have before.

Renee Shaw:

Yeah, thank you, Eamonn.

Renee Shaw:

Thank you, Eamonn and thanks to all of our guests. It's been a really good conversation. I hope you've learned a lot this evening by watching us. Certainly as a caregiver, you are not alone facing these new challenges. Please be sure to use our KET Learn at Home webpage at ket.org for additional help and resources, and watch Friday night for our coronavirus update show at 8:30, 7:30 Central, hosted by Dr. Wayne Tuckson. Again, thank you for watching. I'm Renee Shaw. Please stay safe and be well.