

School supports parents in navigating pandemic conditions

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Tips to help kids cope

- Parents need to recognize what is going on in themselves and their children. Suzanne Krumpelman points out that younger children can manifest anxiety with fidgeting, clinginess and misbehavior.
- She suggests that giving children choices of what to eat, wear or any other small thing can make a difference.
- It is important to let children know that you are going to be OK even though you may be having a bad day.

ROGERS — Most parents found themselves in uncharted waters in March. Schools were shutting their doors indefinitely, and students were beginning online learning.

In a matter of days, kitchen tables and living rooms became classrooms as students transitioned desks from school to home. Many parents also began working remotely from home.

As a mom of first and third graders, Suzanne Krumpelman was also navigating this new normal. As a licensed school counselor at St. Joseph School in Fayetteville, Krumpelman was aware that many parents were struggling to wrap their minds around their new reality.

Just a few days into the quarantine, Krumpelman launched “Navigating the AMI Classroom” to give parents and caregivers the tools they needed to manage these difficult times. AMI stands for Alternative Methods of Instruction.

Krumpelman was hearing from parents of young children who needed support. She began posting short, two- to five-minute videos within the school’s Google Classroom covering a variety of topics that parents or parishioners requested. Topics ranged from how large families are coping to dealing with anxiety.

A longtime parishioner at St. Joseph, Krumpelman said she found many people did not want to hear from an expert they didn’t know.

“They wanted to see a face that they trust,” she said. “People wanted to see people they know and what struggles they are having.”

Krumpelman listened and featured the Klaus family of St. Joseph: two working parents and six children all trying to navigate working from home.

“Richard Klaus started the video out in his closet,” said Krumpelman with a laugh. “This is real life and people connected with it.”

That message resonated and requests came for more content. Since the first video March 17, Krumpelman, who also works as the school librarian, has continued to add at least two videos a week that parents can watch whenever it is convenient for them.

A video addressing the topic of grief was well received. Two sisters, Meagan McCall and Morgan Cobb, parishioners and identical twins who head the Mother Seton bereavement group at St. Joseph, presented the video on grief.

“The coronavirus came on much like an unexpected death of a family member,” said McCall, a licensed social worker. “We were instantly isolated and cut off from vital support systems and some of us lost our jobs. We are grieving the loss of loved ones due to the virus, the loss of identity and we are grieving not receiving the Eucharist and not participating in the holy Mass and now more than ever we are left alone with this grief.”

Krumpelman agrees that a lot of people are dealing with anxiety and grief.

“I feel like people are weary and they worry about their children, finances and getting everything done,” she said.

Despite these feelings of grief and loss, McCall reminds individuals there are ways to cope.

“We can lean into the grief and allow it to transform us,” she said. “We can reach out and heal relationships. We can cast all our grief onto Jesus and Mary who were grieving the loss of each other at Calvary.”

“Most people are more resilient than they give themselves credit for,” Krumpelman added. “I just want to load their toolboxes and give them the tools they need to continue dealing with this.”

Krumpelman said the page is open to all parents who need the support and she has extended that offer beyond St. Joseph.

"I want to serve more of our Catholic family and pray this will be a comfort and help during this difficult time."

Parents can join the virtual classroom and connect by going to classroom.google.com, clicking on the plus in the upper right corner and copying and pasting the code "didzpz2" to join. Krumpelman can also be contacted at skrumpelman@sjfay.com for more help or information.