

Lower School Learning Continuity Plan: Week 3

Dear Lower School Families,

It was wonderful to see everyone who was able to join our virtual community gatherings this past week on Tuesday (JK/K), Wednesday (1st-4th) and Thursday (5th-8th). We have continued to learn and evolve what it means to learn and connect as a community during this campus closure. Your children's teachers continue to devote a tremendous amount of effort, attention, and care to the work of teaching and learning in this new model, and we appreciate the feedback that you continue to share with us about what's working and where there are bumps. I am writing today to address some common questions as we head into week three of remote learning and stay-at-home orders.

What was learned from the virtual community gatherings last week?

During the virtual community gatherings we asked families in small groups to reflect on three questions:

What is a positive moment you've experienced?

What has been an unexpected benefit of the stay-at-home order?

What has been the greatest challenge you and your family have faced?

Small groups reported back to the full group, and you can review the ideas and reflections people shared in the [notes we took](#) during our discussion. We will continue to set up times for families to connect with us and with each other following the Spring Break. Keep your eye on Hillbrook Happenings for dates, times, and logistics. In the meantime, please make every effort to complete [Hillbrook's Family Survey on Distance Learning](#), as your responses will help us more comprehensively understand the student and family experience as we continue to evolve our approaches.

What can I expect as my child processes these significant changes?

The pandemic has altered many familiar things about the way we live and work. [As adults it is difficult to process and comprehend](#), and for children it can be even more confusing. With little to no warning, we fundamentally changed the way they experience school, friends, and family. This is an ideal time for you to review the [common social, physical, and cognitive developmental milestones](#) for your child/ren's age range/s. In times of significant change, stress, or uncertainty it is very typical for children's behavior and development to temporarily regress. You may notice your child revisiting behaviors that they outgrew months or years ago. Behavior is always a communication, particularly for young children who are still gaining facility with language and cannot yet reflect on and describe what they are feeling/experiencing or what they need. Changes in behavior can also be frustrating and confusing for adults, especially in the midst of so many other pressures. Remembering that behavior is one of the primary ways children have to tell us that they need something can help us manage our own stress and emotions. The resources below outline common stress responses for different ages and suggested ways to support your child both proactively and responsively.

[Positive Parenting Connection: Behavior Changes You Can Expect to See In Your Child](#)
[NCTSN: Parent & Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease](#)
[Center for Disease Control: Helping Children Cope](#)
[Center for Disease Control: Managing Stress & Anxiety During COVID-19](#)
[From a Hillbrook Parent: Resilience Model](#)
[Psychology Today: Making Your Home a Safe Haven](#)

What advice do you have about how I can talk to my child in age-appropriate ways about what's happening in the world, why they can't go back to school, and other questions they might have?

As the days and weeks of the stay-at-home order continue, it is likely that children's questions will continue to evolve and change. One of the most important things to remember about children is that [they learn nearly everything about behavior from watching and listening to others](#) in the world. Feelings are contagious, and there are a number of resources below that can help you support yourself and your child in identifying and processing feelings that are very normal during this time.

A number of months ago, Director of the Scott Center of Social Entrepreneurship, Annie Makela, shared with our faculty community an endearing video called [The Scared is Scared](#). In a conversation between an adult and a child (with accompanying visuals and acting that is sure to delight viewers of all ages), a story about two friends, Toby Mouse and Asa Bear, unfolds. As the child and adult reflect together on the lessons of the story they've told together, they discuss the feelings that come with endings and uncertainty. They settle on the moral of the story: "*The Scared is scared of things you like.*" This video is a really wonderful doorway to discussing emotions with your child, and also provides a concrete strategy for chasing the scared away.

[Recorded Webinar: Parenting in the Age of Coronavirus](#)
[Harvard Business Review: Anxiety is Contagious. Here's How to Contain It](#)
[Coping With Childhood Stress](#)
[A Therapist's 5 Tips for Prioritizing Your Family's Mental Health](#)

If I need more resources or activities to set my child up with during the day, what can you recommend?

Hillbrook is continuing to build out our [Family Learning Resources page](#) to support families who are looking for more options beyond the daily provided school activities. On this page, you can find activity videos from extended care staff and links to other comprehensive resource collections that you can draw from to suit the needs of your family. If you find other collections that you find useful, please send them our way so we can review them for inclusion!

My child is struggling to adjust to the "school from home" routine, what can I try?

As we described above, it is very normal for this significant shift to at-home learning to have varying impacts on individual children. We would like to strongly emphasize that you create routines and structures that work for your family and your individual child. This is a highly unusual time in our local and global community, and the school will continue to strive to provide as much comprehensive and varied support for the wide range of families we serve as possible. That said, there is no expectation or pressure that you or your child complete everything that is provided. Please choose what provides your child the greatest sense of success and comfort, knowing that the shape of the home learning experience will likely continue to evolve as time passes.

We know this is an exhausting and overwhelming time for you. These circumstances have asked you to put on the hat of "School Supporter" in a new way. As I have combed through SeeSaw, I have seen videos of families dancing together and the community sharing new aspects of their daily lives that they are uncovering. There are delights to be discovered here. When school is in session on campus, we are regularly afforded the privilege of seeing the "daytime version" of your children, and I know you are now getting to witness some of these small joys with them too. The links below are collected from a wide range of sources that echo these sentiments: slow down, provide your child choice when possible, find a routine that works for your family, and adjust according to the messages your child is sharing with you, verbally or behaviorally.

[10 Tips for Parents on Sheltering in Place Without Losing Your Minds, from Julie Lythcott-Haims](#)
[NPR: How to Turn Your Home Into A School Without Losing Your Sanity](#)
[Edutopia: Making Learning at Home More Self Directed](#)
[KQED Mindshift: Tips for Managing the Stress of Social Distancing As a Family](#)
[KQED Mindshift: Parenting During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)
[Stanford's Challenge Success: Resources for Remote Learning](#)

How will the Lower School Learning Continuity Plan continue to evolve in the coming weeks?

This week, Lower School teachers will begin posting children's daily learning tasks to SeeSaw at 8:00pm on the night prior to the day they are assigned. We know that younger students need more support getting their day set up, and we understand that having assignments posted at 8:00am during Morning Meeting can make it challenging to help get your child/ren situated effectively as the day begins.

During the day if you have questions for your child's homeroom teacher, please email the grade level teaching team address (juniorkindergarten@hillbrook.org, kindergarten@hillbrook.org, 1st@hillbrook.org,

2nd@hillbrook.org, 3rd@hillbrook.org, 4th@hillbrook.org). This will facilitate transparency in common issues families might be facing with a task and improve response flow. If you have a question for a specialist, please email that teacher directly at their individual email address.

In accordance with best practices, we will continue to provide and evolve a blended learning experience with synchronous (live) opportunities to meet together “in person” and daily assigned asynchronous learning tasks. We are eager to learn from the feedback that you will provide in the family survey. We continue to ask teachers to prioritize and emphasize connection and relationship when meeting with young students “live.” [Maintaining the bond that teachers have formed with children is critical](#) to their ongoing sense of security and social-emotional connectedness in this highly unusual moment.

In closing, I invite you all to reflect on these words:

"This pandemic experience is a massive experiment in collective vulnerability. We can be our worst selves when we're afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don't have to be scary when we're scared. Let's choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let's choose each other." - Brené Brown

As we tackle each day together as a community, there will be moments where fear, worry, uncertainty, discomfort, inconvenience, and sheer exhaustion challenge our reserves. In that moment we have a choice: to choose awkward, brave, and kind or to feed a cycle of stress and fear. Sometimes we'll make the wrong choice, we are each human after all. Sometimes we'll fail to be our best for our kids, partners, colleagues, community members, and even for ourselves. Nevertheless, I know that if we commit to being aware of the tendency to “be scary when we're scared” and endeavor together to hold true to our shared values, over time this community has the best chance of coming out the other side of this kinder, braver, and stronger.

Best,
Colleen