

# Advice on supporting children in the midst of school closures, cancellations

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted life around the world, and sudden closures mean a loss of familiar routine.

Students left school on a Thursday for a typical weekend. Then schools were shut down for nearly two weeks... then for the rest of the year as education rapidly switched to distance learning.

In a time when everyone is adjusting to a new normal, school counselors encourage parents to help their students build resilience — the ability to adapt in a positive way in the presence of adversity.

“There are things we can all do to more effectively cope with the pandemic and the associated stressors,” said Heather Heriza.

Heriza and her husband, Pat, are licensed clinical social workers who contract as behavior specialists with the Baker School District.

Silas Turner is the school counselor at Baker High School.

All three emphasize the need to establish structure and routine at home.

“To me, that is right up there with the most important things for resilience,” Pat Heriza said.

Turner said it needn’t be a rigid schedule, but a predictable routine is helpful in times of uncertainty.

“Just stay consistent with something basic,” he said. “Routine says ‘things are stable, we’re okay.’”

Students at Baker High, he said, are accustomed to seven class periods a day. However, he doesn’t recommend trying to mimic a traditional school day with at-home learning.

“We have to change that mindset to keep these kids busy for seven hours a

## *Resilience: the ability to adapt in a positive way in the presence of adversity*

Sayward Harrison at the University of South Carolina is a psychologist who studies resilience within the context of infectious disease epidemics. Her key points on building resilience include:

- Humans have remarkable capacity to adapt and thrive — even in really challenging situations.
- Practicing brief daily acts of mindfulness and gratitude can help reduce anxiety and improve mood.
- Actively working to change negative thoughts into positive ones can help when we are getting bogged down with all the bad news.
- Practicing good self-care — eating healthy, getting daily physical activity, engaging in enjoyable activities — is also very important in stressful times, especially for caregivers.
- Positive, structured parenting is helpful when going through a stressful experience with your children. Families should work together to establish clear, open communication with each other and to set up daily routines and expectations while in the home. This is a stressful experience for both adults and children, and it is normal to get frustrated more often than

day,” Turner said. “This is a great time to get creative.”

Top priorities, they say, are to take care of yourself, your children, eat healthy, get good sleep, and exercise.

is typical.

- Practicing good coping skills and modeling them for your children is important.

### **Post-traumatic growth**

One concept that Harrison studied is “post-traumatic growth” — the idea that while stressful situations like COVID-19 can bring about a lot of bad things, they also can bring about positive changes that we never would have expected. Examples are extra family time to strengthen relationships, spending time on new hobbies, and setting good daily practices such as taking a walk or meditating.

### **turnaroundusa.org**

A wealth of coronavirus resources can be found at [turnaroundusa.org](http://turnaroundusa.org). This site provides information for both educators and parents that includes household and remote school routines and procedures checklist, a routines planner, and an emotional response strategies list.

### **Connections for BHS students**

Students can stay in contact by following Baker High School on Instagram: [bakerhsbulldogs](https://www.instagram.com/bakerhsbulldogs). Show how you are rocking quarantine by tagging #bulldogsrockquarantine

Parents who exhibit resilience set a good example for their children.

“When we build our resilience, we’re building it for our children,” Heather Heriza said.

## Resources

The school counselors of the Baker School District want students, parents, and community members to know there are resources available. Feel free to contact your school’s counselor at the e-mail addresses listed here: **Haines Elementary**, [pat.heather.heriza@bakersd.org](mailto:pat.heather.heriza@bakersd.org); **Brooklyn**, [erin.justus@bakersd.org](mailto:erin.justus@bakersd.org); **South Baker**, [luke.burton@bakersd.org](mailto:luke.burton@bakersd.org); **Baker Middle School**, [jeana.phillips@bakersd.org](mailto:jeana.phillips@bakersd.org); **Baker High School**, [silas.turner@bakersd.org](mailto:silas.turner@bakersd.org).

If you or someone you know is experiencing severe emotional distress or is suicidal, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY by contacting one or more of the following:

- Call 911 or local mental health crisis line New Directions Northwest (541) 519-7126
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK En espanol: 1-888-628-9454
- Crisis Text Line (text “HOME” to 741741)
- The Teen Line: 1-310-855-HOPE (4673)
- National Youth Crisis Hotline 1-800-448-4663
- Substance use help: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- Community counseling: [warmline.org](http://warmline.org)
- Oregon Youthline: call 877-968-8491 or text “teen-2teen” to 839863