



24 March 2020

COVID-19 Update #4 – Student Wellbeing from the Principal for Parents and Caregivers

Dear Parents & Caregivers,

I am writing to further update you on the changing situation in response to coronavirus - COVID-19. Please be advised that Victoria Point State High School has had zero reported cases to date.

As you may have heard in his press conference on 22 March 2020, the Prime Minister reiterated the view that schools are an essential part of our community and should remain open. This continues to be the advice of Australia's chief health officers.

In line with this direction, Queensland state schools will remain open at this time. The National Cabinet also determined that while schools will remain open for now, parents and caregivers can choose if they send their child to school or keep them at home. Following this directive, student absence at Victoria Point State High School will be recognised as 'Other' without penalisation. All students who are absent from school must provide a letter, a SMS or a phone call from their parent or caregiver explaining the reason for the absence – student.absence@vpshs.eq.edu.au or 0427 075 986. If you choose to keep your child at home, you must be responsible for them. You must ensure they stay at home and that they continue their learning using the material and websites that you can access online.

Looking after your child's mental health

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, our school continues to prepare for continuity of learning and teaching. Victoria Point State High School's student wellbeing support resources will be accessible online using our Learning Platform – Moodle, which can be accessed from the School webpage under Quick links: <https://vpshs.eq.edu.au/> or Direct Link: <https://vpshs.moodlesite.pukunui.net/> from Wednesday 25 March 2020.

Control during uncertainty

The new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 causes the disease COVID-19, which can be like a common cold but it can also have more serious complications. Signs of infection may include: fever, cough and shortness of breath. One reason people experience anxiety during a pandemic is uncertainty about its impact. Research during the 2009 swine flu (H1N1) pandemic found those people who struggled with uncertainty were more likely to see the pandemic as threatening, and this can lead to increased levels of anxiety. One way to provide our children with certainty in uncertain times is with facts, for example, telling them the evidence so far shows children are less likely to experience severe symptoms than older adults. You can also help them gain a sense of control by giving them strategies to help prevent them catching the virus.

Practise good hygiene

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says we should channel our concern into good hygiene. Encourage your children to wash their hands with soap and water frequently (particularly after going to the toilet, coming from a public place, and before and after eating). Children should also use a tissue to sneeze into and put the tissue in the bin afterwards.

Be careful with the news and media

A quick scan of the news brings up headlines such as "Australia's coronavirus death rate could proportionally be worse than China's, expert warns". This report even includes a graph showing "How likely are you to die from Coronavirus?" Exposing children to such reports can increase their fear and anxiety. There is a clear and strong relationship between what children see as threatening information in the media and their level of fear. So be careful with what news media your children are exposed to. Try to watch, listen or read it with them so you are there for any questions they may have.

Stay with the facts

When answering such questions, use information from the World Health Organisation and other trustworthy sources to inform yourself. Filter some of the incorrect information around preventing COVID-19 (eating garlic, Having hot baths) and inform your family with the correct information. Don't be someone who passes on incorrect information to your children or others.

Talk about your feelings

It's OK to feel worried. Talking about your feelings of stress can help you work through them. If you try to push down feelings of stress this can have an impact on your health. As parents you only have to listen and hear your child's concerns. You can't promise things will be safe or certain. But you can assure them that as a family you will work together to manage whatever comes up in the future and that you are there to listen to them.

Don't pass on your fear

Research from the 2009 Swine Flu pandemic showed children's fear of the disease was significantly related to their parents' fear of the disease. This effect of parents passing on fear even exists when there is nothing to fear. Research showed if parents get negative information about something that is harmless, they are more likely to pass on those negative beliefs to their children and increase their level of fear. So even if you feel stressed about COVID-19, you need to make sure you don't pass on this fear to your children. Show them you are calm. Don't be a carrier for fear.

Keep on living life

It is easy to get swept away with panic about the future and what may happen. But being future-focused only contributes to anxiety. Help your child to focus on the now and what they are doing today. These things are in their control – work hard at school. Continue their routine and enjoy the moments.

Work together

This is not a time to be selfish, but to work together and support one another. Be kind to others (don't steal their toilet paper) and encourage your children to be kind to others as well. Being less self-focused helps to alleviate stress and give life more meaning and purpose.

Author: Mandie Shean, Lecturer, School of Education, Edith Cowan University.

Websites and apps to assist with children's wellbeing:

www.smilingmind.com.au

www.kidshelpline.com.au

www.positivepenguins.com

Other Available Supports

Victoria Point State High School Guidance Officers, Head of Inclusive Education and Program Managers are available to provide extra support to students who may be anxious and to provide information and advice to parents and carers. If you are concerned about your child's wellbeing, you can contact the school:

- guidance.officer@vpshs.eq.edu.au
- sep@vpshs.eq.edu.au or
- visit our school Facebook for 'Words of Wellbeing – WOW'. www.vpshs.eq.edu.au

Support is also available through a number of Queensland Government agencies and community organisations. Parents and carers can:

- ☐ call 13Health (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- ☐ review headspace's tips for a healthy headspace for friends and family, or contact headspace for professional support
- ☐ contact Lifeline Australia's telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 for information, referral and advice
- ☐ For the latest advice, information and resources, go to **www.health.gov.au**
- ☐ Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on **1800 020 080**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- ☐ Obtain help and information from the local General Practitioner or Community Health Centre

Ongoing Planning

As we have already seen across the world, this situation is likely to continue for some time and is evolving. As such, as a school and as a community, we must all prepare over the short, medium and long term. I ask that you continue to take all necessary local actions to support your child's, and the school's, health and hygiene and act in a protective and preventative manner to help limit the spread of coronavirus. I will continue to provide communication as Australia's response to COVID-19 evolves. Thank you for your vigilance in helping us manage this public health issue.

Yours sincerely



Scot Steinhardt
Principal