

Guidelines & Resources for Sailing Centers to Support Youth and Staff



Supporting the social-emotional well-being of youth & instructors upon returning to sailing during and after the COVID-19 crisis is a critical challenge for many sailing schools. Additionally, many youth are trying to process what is happening in their communities around the Black Lives Matter movement. They could be directly affected and processing their own racial identity, those of others around them, and how this shows up within their communities and our country. This guide can help sailing schools and staff support both youth sailors and their instructors at their programs for these current events and beyond.

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Background of Youth

Background

As human beings we are naturally social. Our lives are centered around social activities and efforts to build connections and relationships with others. The term “social distancing” implies being socially disconnected from all but our immediate family. This can be difficult for anyone to handle and even harder for youth, for whom those social connections are so important. Over the past couple of months, we have had to find ways to be socially distant but still foster our social and emotional connections.

How will everyone’s social and emotional state be when they return? The truth is we are all unsure, but research has shown that there will most likely be an uptick in mental health problems. It is helpful to look at what youth might have experienced over the past couple of months to provide accurate solutions.

Youth Experiences During Covid-19:

- Isolation from peers & close family members
- A loss of a loved one or experienced a love one getting sick
- A lack of structure & routine
- Had minimal demands or expectations placed on them
- Had Food & Housing Insecurities



- Loss of Family income
- Community-based fear and outrage over racial discrimination on top of a global pandemic
- Trauma (see next section)

Trauma in Youth

Trauma

The COVID-19 pandemic, related school closures, and racial disparities in our country have exposed many youth to trauma. For students who may already experience trauma at home, school closures significantly increase their risk of exposure. Others may be experiencing it for the first time. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, types of child trauma can include:

- Experiences of bullying, community violence and unrest
- Natural disasters (for example, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and fires)
- Family violence, medical trauma, physical abuse, sexual abuse
- Terrorism, violence, and traumatic grief
- Medical trauma
- Complex trauma also occurs, where a child has multiple traumatic experiences

When to get Professional Help: Recognize when to ask for professional help for your sailors or staff if they disclose:

- Abuse/neglect of any kind (state mandated reporting applies)
- Self-injury (e.g. self-cutting, suicidal ideation, suicide attempt) or injury to another sailor
- Alcohol/drug use/overdose/dependence
- When behavior or emotions continue to get worse despite current efforts

For more information on childhood trauma please visit:

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org
- Trauma Responsive Coaching [Play Like a Champion Trauma Sensitive Coaching](#)

How Youth May Present:

Presentation

A youth's reaction following a traumatic event like the pandemic will vary depending on their age, developmental level, degree of support, and coping skills. Some youth will not show signs of stress while others will. Below are some typical reactions that youth may exhibit:

Negative Feelings

- Hopelessness or sadness
- Irritability and anger
- Higher anxiety & stress levels
- Sense of loss of control
- Loneliness or disconnect
- Disappointment



- Grief or loss

Behaviors

- Increase in avoidance behaviors, shorter attention spans, or seem more forgetful
- Increase in attention seeking behaviors such as calling out, acting silly, or outbursts
- Could see more meltdowns or outbursts due to higher than normal demands
- Younger children could also become clingier, have separation anxiety at drop off, or increased stomachaches, headaches, and other bodily aches

Tips to Help Support Youth Sailors & Staff:

1. **Manage Personal Mental Health:** Many of us are worried about the current situation and living with uncertainty is not easy. Yet, anxiety is “contagious.” Your sailors will know that you are nervous even if you try to hide it. So how can you keep your cool, despite your own worries?
 - a. Make sure you are up to date on information
 - b. Talk to a trusted adult who supports you
 - c. Take care of your physical health by getting enough sleep and exercise
2. **Acknowledging the Situation:** Acknowledging, at a developmentally appropriate level, what has been going on is very reassuring to youth. It fosters trust and encourages youth to share their feelings. You can acknowledge that no matter what they’re feeling, you’re there to listen and be an advocate.
3. **Validate Feelings and Concerns:** Kids may have all sorts of reactions to our national crises and have been through a great deal of challenges over the past couple of months. Some of their feelings or concerns may be realistic, while others might be exaggerated; however, it is important to take these feelings seriously by providing the following:
 - a. Provide a safe space & time to express those feelings on a regular basis
 - b. Let them know there are safe adults around them that they can talk to
 - c. Let their entire peer group know that everyone needs to be supportive of each other – they are in a safe space with both staff and sailors
 - d. Know when you need to get your supervisors to help you deal with more complicated situation
4. **Addressing Safety:** During stressful times, no matter what their age, youth want to know: (1) if they are safe, (2) if their loved ones are safe, (3) and how the situation will affect their daily lives. Therefore, addressing all the safety measures that your sailing school is taking as a precaution will help decrease a youth’s anxiety about their safety.
5. **Redevelop Schedules & Structure:** Routine and structure give us a sense of security and help us develop many skills. A predictable routine allows children to feel safe and to develop a sense of control in their lives. Due to the pandemic, our sailor’s schedules, routines, and structure have been altered significantly. Therefore, it is extremely important to implement structure and routine into their sailing school experience. The more time you spend at the beginning of the season or session developing those expectations and routines, the less time you spend later having to redirect undesirable behavior.

6. **Model & Reinforcement Desired Behavior:** Children and adolescents often learn about how to behave by seeing the appropriate behavior modeled by adults. They also thrive by receiving direct feedback from these adults. The more a desired behavior is positively reinforced, the greater the chances the behavior will be repeated and become a habit. You can model and reinforce desired behavior by:
 - a. Practicing proper hygiene & social distancing protocols
 - b. Following sailing schools' rules
 - c. Using descriptive words to express your feelings, wants and needs
 - d. Encouraging and modeling empathy, cooperation, conflict resolution
 - e. Showing up and being consistent
 - f. Creating a space where everyone can show up as themselves and not be judged for differences

7. **Teach about Emotions & Behavior to Increase Coping Skills:** Children and adults need to be able to express their emotions to cope with life. Emotional expression is not always learned intrinsically, so you cannot rely on the assumption that sailors are getting this information from their schools or at home.
 - a. There are a ton of curriculums out there to help with this. See Resources List below for more information.

8. **Create a Tool Kit:**
 - a. Break Space- create a quiet and calm space for youth to take a break in with various break choices. Make sure to include timers so youth know exactly how long they are allowed to be in the space.
 - b. Break Choices—drawing, yoga cards, books, fidget tools, or a special project (small boat fixes are cathartic!)

Outside Resources

Curricula & Websites:

- Second Step: <https://www.secondstep.org/covid19support>
- Zones of Regulation Program: <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>
- <https://www.playlikeachampion.org/trauma>
- Center for Racial Justice in Education – Resources for talking about Race, Racism and Racialized Violence with Kids: <https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/>

Articles:

- <https://www.mghclaycenter.org/hot-topics/7-ways-to-support-kids-and-teens-through-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Parent and Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the 2019 Coronavirus Disease: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019>
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom – A Resource for Educators: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing_race_and_trauma_in_the_classroom_educator_s.pdf

Videos:



- Children of the Pandemic Video: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/04/children-pandemic-how-will-kids-be-shaped-coronavirus-crisis>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Parent and Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the 2019 Coronavirus Disease: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019>

Apps:

- Mindfulness:
 - Headspace
 - Calm
 - Stop, Breathe & Think
- Social Emotional Learning:
 - Middle School Confidential
 - Stop, Breathe, and Think App
- Body Breaks:
 - Go Noodle