The Effects of Stress

We are all experiencing a level of stress we have never encountered before. It is important to understand the effects of stress on all people and how we can reduce the negative behaviors associated with stress. Be understanding of family members’ behaviors that may be an effect of stress.

Definition: WHEN THE DEMANDS OF LIFE EXCEED ONE’S SKILL IN COPING WITH THOSE DEMANDS, THE RESULT IS STRESS.

There are 3 behaviors that are associated with STRESS:
1. Aggression: this can be verbal or physical aggression. People may yell, curse, use hostile words, argue, name-call, become defiant or use physical behaviors, such as hitting, punching, pushing, kicking or throwing objects.
2. Regression: People may not demonstrate the skills they have; people may cry, whine, tantrum, forget things, lose things, lack focus and/or motivation.
3. Withdrawal: People may flee from the situation or shut down emotionally. People may feel immobilized; children tend to hide or run away.

Typical Stressors:
- Life changes! When our environment changes, we experience stress. These changes can include, moving, divorce, death of a loved one, change of schedule, job change or loss, or a comprehensive change of life as with the COVID19.
- Unpredictability! People need to feel a sense of security and predictability. People experience stress when events are unknown, in flux, and frequently changing.

What can we do?
1. Create Predictability (even under changing conditions): Make a daily schedule that can be followed. Keep to a few routines that are stable, such as mealtimes, study times, play times.
2. Build skills: Help children build confidence by giving them things to do in which they can be SUCCESSFUL. See the CUB handout. Teach your children ways to calm down, such as deep breathing and self talk.
3. Model Calm Behavior: Reduce your own stress by engaging in activities that calm your nervous system (exercise, organize, yoga, artwork, projects, etc.)
4. Distract: If your child shows one of the behaviors above, change focus by organizing a game (see handout on play activities). Start a new activity--your child will join. Keep your child busy.