

HANDOUTS AND CHECKLISTS FOR FACULTY

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GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

We are looking forward to school reconvening soon, *Baruch HaShem!* The many months of quarantine have placed demands on all of us. For those of you who have young children living at home, you have spent these months engaged both in teaching your classes, while also participating in the teaching of your own children. You know well the conditions which children have faced. For those of you who do not have school age children at home, it is important to be sensitive to the circumstances which some students and their families have endured. Those realities may have shaped the readiness or lack of readiness of each returning student. Be mindful too that it is possible that some students may have dropped below the academic level which the incoming teacher normally would expect. It is also possible that some students might have regressed in their preparedness for classroom and social life, after many months without traditional school and interpersonal involvements. In turn, many students may return to school with great enthusiasm, energy and high motivation to continue their learning and education. Many students, we have been advised, actually shined during the modified instruction methods during quarantine. We are anticipating a range of levels and preparedness among our student body.

OUR GRATITUDE TO OUR FACULTY

We are especially sensitive to the professional pressures which each of you have faced. We also are very appreciative of the flexibility and ingenuity which you have provided your students during this time. We applaud your ability to have remained focused on your students while also dealing with personal and family responsibilities while remaining at home. Each faculty member has shown great dedication to the school, to the educational process, and has drawn on creative strengths to reach their students during difficult circumstances. Your flexibility, your time commitment and your own resiliency is commended by parents and also by the school administration. We hope that your personal investment to student growth will guide you in facing the new challenges of returning to the more conventional classroom.

SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-CARE GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

As we prepare to return to school on campus, there are many areas which we all must be attentive to:

- This has been a long interval where schedules and routines have been altered and disrupted
- Many of us as adults have been relatively isolated from our normal peer and social groups
- Many have been exposed to painful changes, to illness, and to loss
- We all need time to readjust, both psychologically and physically, to regular teaching, classroom realities, and curricular routines
- Each of us will want to consider reconditioning our own sleep and wake cycles
- Many may want to catch up with colleagues, and share experiences from this challenging ordeal
- The faculty and administration welcome your valuable input as we transition back to school, and plan curriculum and methodology to meet our students where they are
- The faculty and administration will address factors impacting faculty morale
- Administration and faculty will address possible changes in the lives and morale of students
- Administration and faculty will collaborate to plan and optimize student transition back to a traditional classroom
- Faculty will need sensitization to changes in student functioning after this challenging absence
- The initial priority for students returning to class is facilitating positive re-integration

SELF AWARENESS AND SELF-CARE CHECKLIST FOR TEACHERS

A significant change in routine and schedule, particularly one which endures for months and which requires major changes in the teaching format, method, and environment, can engender changes within the most resilient and mature educator. There are some very common, and very normal, effects when facing and coping with these challenges. It is important to acknowledge one's own "status" because stresses do linger, do affect motivation, and can influence one's approach to teaching. This final point is made more poignant when we anticipate that some students may also display their own reactions to the quarantine, and may in fact require different approaches than we have used in the past.

This check list is for self-awareness and does not need to be submitted or shared with others. Some teachers may find it helpful, nonetheless, to discuss their current "status" with colleagues, many of whom will validate and normalize your own experience.

- I am very enthused about returning to school
- I have learned some new skills to enhance my classroom teaching
- I notice less drive and energy, which might affect my re-adjusting to the classroom schedule
- I have sustained some stresses during this time and continue to feel their effects
- At times, I find myself more worried than is typical of me
- At times, I have been more emotional than is typical of me
- I have been grieving a loss
- I am still concerned about health risks and contagion
- I am not as patient these days and need some tools for managing this in the classroom
- I wonder if I can compete with the online methods once traditional classes resume
- I am concerned about my own children going back to school
- I am concerned about being able to maintain family closeness developed during this time
- I am not sure what to do if the learning level has fallen and students have to relearn last year's work
- I feel that I can benefit from some in-service training
- I feel that I can benefit from some guidance and consultation about handling some students
- I had begun to feel comfortable at home with the routine which I developed and now transitioning back to a packed schedule.

PREPARING TO ADDRESS STUDENTS AND CLASSES

We will be calling a faculty meeting followed by grade-specific meetings prior to beginning the new term. We are requiring that you attend an in-service for addressing your own status post-quarantine and for building staff cohesiveness. Grade-specific meetings will focus on possible classroom challenges which might shape academic and classroom management approaches.

It is important that all faculty connect and have an opportunity, with the guidance of a trained consultant, to discuss how they are doing after these many months. This will both boost personal morale *iy”H* and will also assist teachers in being able to stay attuned to their student’s own circumstances without blurring personal vs. student realities. The experience of an adult exposed to the COVID 19 stresses differs from those of children. In order to be supportive to our students, we will want to first provide some necessary support to ourselves. By all definitions, this life-disrupting reality has been a crisis and for some, it has been traumatizing. It is entirely normal to have lingering subjective reactions during such times, and we will benefit from guidance on self-awareness and self-care as adults. In turn, there are those who developed exceptional skills for coping, and also now have great insights into working with students under trying conditions. Their contributions can be encouraging for others. We will make time to learn from one another in preparing for the new school year.

There are some preliminary guidelines pertaining to students which we want you to study and to utilize:

- Expect some students to be drowsy and less attentive and motivated. They have had a very different sleep and wake cycle for months, and a full day of class will drain them, initially.
- We are working with parents to help recondition their children’s day and night cycles. Be patient. Report any marked concerns to the principal who will contact a parent should concerns be noted.
- Some students will be less focused and will have poor concentration for some while
- Some students will have regressed and lost their earlier level of academic attainment.
- Some students will be restless, or may be more withdrawn after months of less social activity.
- Some students might show signs of trauma. We are working with parents to familiarize us with any ordeals, trauma, or loss which might be impacting their child’s return to class. We will be providing in-service training for teachers on how to respond to a child who may have experienced objective trauma.
- Students may be grieving. Grief is an ongoing gradual process, and requires sensitivity and constructive input from the teacher. Guidance will be provided on this to all faculty.
- Some students actually may have performed better under these circumstances, and now need to adjust to being back in a classroom.
- Students who previously may have performed well in class may not have adjusted well to zoom/phone instruction. This will affect both their academic readiness as well as their confidence and attitude about returning to class.
- You are likely competing with digital media and related modalities which students have used or have been exposed to during these months at home. Some students will find the contrast of traditional lecture and classroom teaching less stimulating and less interesting. This will require ingenuity and also patience from all faculty. We will be providing an in-service to address grade- and age-appropriate tools for garnering the motivation of your returning students.
- Some students have not had their familiar vacation or summer camp experience as a buffer before school reconvenes. This may impact motivation and energy level in class.

ASSESSING STUDENT NEEDS IN SETTING CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

During the first many weeks of school, we require a means of tracking and assessing students functioning. We hope that there will be positive signs with most of our students. The following check list is to be used when a teacher notes concerning signs in specific students:

Information provided on these checklists will be submitted to the principal who will review and follow-through with parents, or will make recommendations to the teacher on addressing these concerns. Each student's assessment should be regarded as confidential and delicate, although teachers who share particular students can compare their observations with one another for the sake of aiding any action plan to assist herein.

[Prior to schools returning to campus attendance, the following check lists should be considered for principals, for teachers, and for parents.]

CHECKLIST FOR STUDENT CONCERNS

STUDENT CONCERN ASSESSMENT		
Name of student:		
Grade:		Class:
Rebbe/Teacher:		
	Concerns: Check all those that apply	Describe
	Appears Sad	
	Appears Fearful or Anxious	
	Appears Aggressive or Angry	
	Is less attentive in class	
	Seems distracted and pre-occupied	
	Is not prepared in class	
	Is socially withdrawn from others	
	Comes to school unkempt	
	Is sleepy/falling asleep during class	
	Is forgetful	
	Seems hyper and overactive	
	Seems unmotivated and unresponsive in class	
	Shows other concerning behaviors	
	Other (please describe):	

PREPARING PARENTS TO PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN FOR RETURN TO SCHOOL

Dear Parents:

We anticipate with great relief the forthcoming return to school, and our faculty is already preparing and planning a curriculum and programs which will promote readjustment for all students.

During the months of quarantine and staying at home, a number of changes have occurred in all of our routines. Parents: Prepare yourselves! Each family has adapted to the realities of these many months in their own unique manner. Returning to a school schedule also will involve some new adaptive measures.

Your children will need a unique blend of encouragement, patience, limit setting and guidance.

Our school wants to partner with parents to promote a reasonably smooth adjustment for all.

- We understand that some children might be unaccustomed now to the schedule, routine and structure which are typical of a school day. We recommend that you reacquaint your child with the expectation that whereas quarantine has allowed for its own structure, returning to school will involve classroom attendance, classwork, homework and adhering to school rules.
- We hope that parents will retain their roles in reviewing each child's learning nightly, and in overseeing each child's readjustment to the classroom requirements.
- We turn to all parents to address their children's struggles in returning to school life and social interactions. Some children are resilient and may be eager to get back on schedule. Others may be slower to adjust. Patience, optimism and supporting the school's values will promote a positive attitude in your children. Modeling for your children your confidence and belief in the school and its program will help instill for them a positive attitude.

In order to assure that your child will be ready to adjust to the school day and its expectations, we strongly recommend the following, at least two weeks before school commences:

- Please set your child's bedtime to the time which he or she normally would be preparing for sleep during the school year.
- Please set your child's wake-time to the time in which he or she would be getting up during the regular school year.
- We recommend that you encourage your child to begin dressing and grooming in the morning, in that many parents report that their children have been spending much of their day in pajamas and/or in their bedroom.
- Many parents have reported that during the extended home time, children may have developed irregular eating habits. We recommend that you start reconditioning your child to maintain breakfast time, snack time, lunch time and so on so that they can better adapt to the school day and school week at a nutritional and energy level.
- We recommend that you assure that your child has begun catching up on reading and writing skills so that they are equipped to return to those practices as needed in the classroom.
- For those whose children have been utilizing digital technology and internet access, we strongly recommend that you begin weaning them from those modalities. This will help reformat their alertness and concentration for more traditional classroom learning.
- For many students, being at home with family has brought out strengths and resiliency. Assess and recognize those positive changes. Reflect as a family on the positive "Corona Keepers" which you all will want to retain for yourselves!
- If your child or family has experienced loss or other major life events which can disrupt their focus and their mood, please notify us. This information will be managed with great discretion and will also help our staff be sensitive to any conditions or concerns with which your child might be returning to classroom life. It is entirely common and normal to make gradual readjustment in the aftermath of stressful experiences.

• We are attaching herein a brief check list to complete and to drop off, mail or email to the principal by _____ 2020.

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

In order to help us better work together, please complete the following checklist for each child. This information will remain confidential and will not be included in your child's student record. All information will be utilized to enhance their learning experience and to guide the school in maintaining a sensitive perspective in encouraging classroom adjustment. We look forward to beginning the school year soon!

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS		
Complete for each child		
Name of child:		Age:
		Grade returning to:
Yes	NO	
		<i>Family members in the home contracted the COVID 19 virus</i>
		<i>My child or children experienced loss of a family member. Please specify:</i>
		<i>My child has experienced other distress during this time</i>
		<i>My child has coped well and been very productive during this time</i>
		<i>Our family has undergone some significant changes Please specify:</i>
		<i>I have noticed changes in my child or children which might affect their schooling Please specify:</i>
		<i>My child had difficulty keeping up with the lessons during this interval</i>
		<i>My child may have fallen behind in his or her study habits and concentration</i>
		<i>My child is looking forward to returning to school and seeing friends</i>
		<i>My child is concerned about social interactions when returning to class</i>
		<i>I have concerns about my child's reintegration into the classroom Please specify:</i>
		<i>I feel that my child might benefit from some time with the school counselor Please specify reason:</i>
		<i>I request a private consultation with the principal or teacher before school to discuss concerns related to my child's return to school</i>

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT REALITIES UPON RETURN TO SCHOOL

Some of the stresses which may have impacted students may begin to ease as they reintegrate socially and reacclimate to the structure of being back at school. Interpersonal activities and connecting to friends can be healing, especially after relative isolation and being secluded in a restrictive home environment. Nonetheless, some students will act out their residual distress, and others will continue to wrestle with anxiety, with grief and with any other lingering psychological effects associated with this challenging chapter of their development.

In addition to reacclimating and to reconstructing social bonds, students who are verbal i.e. elementary and older, need to process their experiences. Emotions undisclosed, thoughts unexpressed, fears unexplored and grief untouched will emerge in the form of cognitive, emotional, physical, behavioral and at times spiritual changes. The majority of children will not require focused professional or therapeutic attention; this is a professional conjecture based on what science shows us about trauma and children. There will be some, both among those who are grieving a loss, and those for whom these months presented unpleasant challenges, who may in time benefit from professional attention. But the majority of our students will cope and will adjust, yet will do so more thoroughly when given some group guidance and the opportunity to process some of their experiences.

The administration will be planning a format for providing students appropriate times and opportunities to discuss their own experiences. This might be done by grade level, or by individual class. There may be carefully planned prepared discussions initiated by the rebbe or teacher, or a select faculty person might be available for addressing groups of students. It is necessary to acquaint teachers with the preferred scope of such a classroom dialogue, and an in-service will aim to provide this guidance. The following is a check list of topics to focus on in addressing students as they return to classroom. Some of these will vary with age and maturity of each set of students.

- Normalize the dialogue by acknowledging first that this has been a long ordeal
- Normalize the reality that it is common to have reactions to having been quarantined
- Normalize the reality that exposure to illness and the fears therein creates distress
- Provide students with an opportunity to share some of their experience
- Preface that no one will judge, tease or criticize anyone else who shares their feelings
- Emphasize that whether in class or after class, each classmate's experience deserves respect and sensitivity
- Preface that the discussion is for the class, and what is discussed stays between classmates
- Encourage supportive reactions, comforting responses, when a student shares personal distress
- Offer time to share a positive memory or experience
- Encourage students to remain sensitive to those who have had more difficult times
- Offer time to share what they enjoyed about the months gone by, and what they will miss
- Encourage students to identify some coping tools they are able to use now in school
- Advise class of your availability to discuss anything which might be troubling a student
- Advise class that you have confidence that they will adjust and catch up over time

It remains most important that faculty at all times be mindful of a child who is in distress or grieving. When uncertain about how to address the child, whether to be flexible with learning expectations, and other areas of uncertainty, please consult with your principal and school guidance counselor. The team of Chai Lifeline's crisis intervention, trauma and bereavement services include a number of experienced *mechanchim* who are trained to consult on these matters, and can be accessed through crisis@chailifeline.org and at 1 855 3 CRISIS.

CLASSROOM DIALOGUES: THE USE OF PROCESSING IN THE CLASS FOR ASSESSING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Some children are resilient and get through crisis with courage and composure. Other children react to stress with a range of normal yet distressing responses. Some children do not react well to hard times.

Therefore, there will be some students who will return to school with enthusiasm and ready to reconnect with friends and to engage in their studies. Some will be ready for friends yet not motivated for studies. Some will not be ready for school in either social or academic spheres. Additionally, in some communities and regions, school is already back in session. Although our department continues to get consultative requests from in-session schools where concerns such as those described below have surfaced, there are other schools which to date have not reported significant concerns within their classroom. Nonetheless, we recommend that you continue studying this document, and read the closing paragraph carefully.

Regardless of how a student appears upon returning to the school, it is the goal of the teacher and rebbe to observe and to monitor how each student actually is adjusting, and how the classroom atmosphere develops. It is entirely normal for children to have been affected in some way or ways by the many stresses and irregularities of these past months. It is unlikely that any person would show no effects at all after having faced the many challenges associated with the pandemic.

The most valuable tool for assessing a student is giving them opportunities to express themselves. This takes place ideally during the first weeks of school, and as part of the classroom experience. This can mean through group discussion, through written work, through creative, artistic expression when appropriate, and through observing the ways in which they behave and interact. The key for a student to express himself or herself is providing them with an open, comfortable setting in which they feel safe and confident about sharing their experiences. For children, just as with adults, a safe environment for self-disclosure is one where feelings and thoughts can be shared without fearing that they will be judged or criticized for being open. For example, a child will only divulge that he is fearful if he knows that he will not be teased or told that he is being childish. The information and points which follow are for guiding schools and teachers on facilitating classroom dialogues to address the students at each one's current level of experience. The dialogues are to allow students to process their own experience, which means to find words to express the matters which are on the minds and heart which might interfere with a smooth adjustment back to school. The processing dialogue will be a means of showing students that they are supported in their efforts to readjust, and to allow also some assessing of their current struggles.

One recommendation for providing that safe and open setting in the classroom is for the teacher or rebbe to refer to the discussion as a chance for "looking at how we are all doing" since COVID (some students refer to the pandemic as COVID, some as Corona, some by other terms). The teacher can normalize in advance by stating that because so many children have talked about what went on, how they felt, and have begun sharing some of things that were hard for them, it would be good if the whole class can have a chance to share their own experiences, and to listen to each other.

If that does not evoke immediate participatory reactions in students, the teacher can then add that "it was a long time at home without school, we couldn't go out or see our friends, some people did not feel well." If the rebbe knows the students well already, it might be comfortable to call on one of them directly to start the conversation, although not by making a child feel singled out and embarrassed. For example, a rebbe who is already close to the students and who can identify a boy whom he knows did not face trauma or loss during this time might say, "Shloimie, tell us about being at home during quarantine." That might break the ice and begin the flow of conversation.

Students should not be confronted with lots of questions and the conversation should stay comfortable and relaxed. Each student can be encouraged to share the things that worked well for them during this time. Once the class is engaged in sharing, the rebbe can shift the focus to the things that did not go so well and were hard. The teacher or rebbe will say in advance that everyone should be listening, and not to interrupt if their friend is speaking, and no one is going to tease or make fun of anyone else, even if a boy talks about being sad and you are not sad yourself, or if a boy says he was scared but you yourself were not afraid.

The teacher or rebbe oversees the flow of the discussion and when a student does share a feeling or a thought which troubled him, the rebbe should respond through validation, which means that he echoes back the feeling which was shared. For example, if a child says that his father was sick and he felt scared, the rebbe can say “that is scary when a father is sick.” It is important to support each boy who shares, not to ask a lot of questions, not to try cheering them up, joking or changing the topic. No one should be taking notes of what anyone says, and no one should be distracted or distracting others during the process. *Remember: if a student asks you to explain a Rashi or to pasken a halacha, you tell him what you think. You get him to change his own thinking by teaching him the correct way to think. However, you cannot use reason and logic to convince a student how he should or should not feel! You cannot talk him out of his experience! A student will not stop reacting because you tell him how he should think about his struggle. A student will do better when he is able to put his own thoughts and feelings into his own words, and for you to hear him, validate and normalize that his reaction is his, his reaction is real and that you and the class will offer him support and encouragement.* Never attempt to use your own logic to convince a student that he is wrong for having a reaction. That discourages, rather than encourages, a student and he will be ashamed to share what he feels.

When the class has completed the discussion, the teacher wraps up what was said through a global validation i.e., “some of us had some sad times. Some of went through scary times. Some of us are still sad, or nervous or not yet feeling great. Everyone in the class is going to show respect and caring for the other classmates. No one is going to tease anyone or ignore anyone. This is the time for all of us to learn to be friends again. So much time has gone by when you could not spend time being friends.”

With younger children (6 and below), the conversation will be less detailed, and many children will be more matter of fact i.e. “I didn’t like staying home all the time”; “my mother was in the hospital”; “it was no fun.” The teacher can encourage the class to talk about being back in school and what seems nice about that. Diverting younger children by focusing on the present once they have talked about the past can be effective in that most younger children will not give detailed disclosures and will keep their disclosures limited and more concrete. Again, the conversation is wrapped up with the reminder that no one is going to make fun of anyone who had a different experience, and all are going to find ways to make school a nicer experience together.

Older children approaching adolescence may focus on some emotional disclosure and may also share more philosophical reactions. They may speak about the pandemic, about suffering, about time wasted, about money and stresses, or about watching how other people were affected. This is common as older children begin to think more like adults, and show signs of compassion, empathy and concern for global and spiritual issues. This does not mean that they are not hurting, or sad or scared. A conversation among teens will often include some emotional content. Each child who discloses to others needs to feel accepted and heard, not dismissed or ridiculed. Again, the teacher stresses to the class that whatever a friend shares represents his experience. It is not to be shared outside of class with others and is not to be used in a hurtful or insulting way. Instead, each boy needs to trust the other classmates that they care about him and about each other. The teacher validates the feelings which are shared and encourages those who want to talk further to approach him.

During these discussions, which ideally take place a few times over the course of the first weeks of school, teachers are encouraged to observe and to take notice of students who may be showing more extreme signs of distress or significant signs

of concern. For example, the teacher will note which child continues to display signs of high anxiety, or deep sadness, or has difficulty staying focused and paying attention, or is overactive, underactive, aggressive, withdrawn, sleepy or unkempt, unmotivated or disruptive. *Behaviors which appear extreme or uncharacteristic of a specific child's past conduct should be noted, utilizing the checklists provided.*

Concerns noted on the checklists will be shared with the principal or designated person, who will then determine whether to contact a child's parents or to plan further inquiring conversations with the student.

Most teachers will gain from a formal consultative review or training on conducting the processing discussions described above. Some may feel unprepared or unwilling to undertake such discussions. These are not therapy groups or psychological interventions. They are a less-clinical or "lower level" of showing effective support to students as they move towards readjusting to the school setting and its demands. They are part of the educational process rather than a mental health process. They are also important tools for gaining information about each child's level of functioning. At times the school may prefer to have its school counselor or social worker conduct these processing conversations. In turn, the school might want to bring in a trained consultant who can guide the faculty and at times can provide a model example within a class for faculty to observe on how to facilitate and lead these discussions.

As a final perspective, we encourage teachers and heads of school to recognize that this pandemic and its many repercussions has been, and may continue to be, a challenge. Many aspects of normal functioning have been altered. Reality has changed along health, interpersonal, economic and many other strata. This does affect people. This does affect us. This affects our children and our students. As resilient as some of us are, and as flexible and adaptable as we want our youth to be, the body and the mind absorb stresses. Our communities have absorbed many real and impactful stresses, including illness, loss, limitations on normal functioning, changes in routine, lack of routine and significant alterations of our schedules and life structure. Be attentive and watchful over the course of these ensuing weeks as schools move towards structuring their classroom and social routines and schedules. It is normal to be affected by prolonged and stressful changes. It is not normal to experience no effects. You may detect elements of disrupted or decreased functioning over the course of time, whether reflecting a child's personal distress, or reactions to home realities about which the school has little or no information, or other delayed reactions to the challenges and conditions experienced over the last half year. Even when the school opts to continue as normal and to table the idea of providing some processing dialogues for students, the time may arrive when you can utilize the information in this packet and implement our recommendations. As always, our department is available for consultation in considering appropriate steps to take, should concerns emerge over time.

Rabbi Dr. Dovid Fox

Director of Interventions and Community Education, Project Chai

Consultation can be accessed at all times through contacting the Chai Lifeline crisis hotline at 855-3-CRISIS.