

edu-inc-039-control-what-you-can

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SPEAKERS

Gersh Aitchison, Jax Aitchison, Gavin Kennedy

Gavin Kennedy 00:08

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the edulink COVID-19 podcast is an ancient Chinese curse that says May you live in interesting times. We're living in interesting times in South Africa, the time of contrasts and a time of rollercoaster emotions. On the one hand, all the teachers and staff of the school have now been vaccinated, and our Constitutional Court is functioning. On the other hand, we got people looting warehouses.

00:42

This time of the year, there was always drama, and tension and anxiety in schools with children. Mr. Aitchison, how do you deal with it every year and particularly this year when the stakes feel a little higher?

Gersh Aitchison 00:57

Wow Gavin, Yes, what a interesting couple of weeks, it's been the last podcast anticipated having another podcast about when we're going back to school and the final preparation for exams. Little that I think that we'll be talking about looting, and being safe in another way, other than just being safe as COVID. Yes, mistakes. And I think it's a very good thing that we actually starting this podcast, addressing the elephant in the room, which is the level of stress and anxiety that our whole community is facing at the moment. And I think it's very important to take the opportunity then to just maybe take a deep breath, take a step back. And let's differentiate between what we can control right now and what we can't control. Because even though the stress levels are really high, the fact of the matter is, some of the stresses are still entirely normal. And there could be the exams. And then there are other stresses that we can't necessarily control in their entirety. But there are little bits and pieces we can do to try and help the situation within our own homes. And, you know, often we talk to the children and the parents about normal stressors that a child would experience. During an academic year, for example, something we speak about the roller coaster, we know that during the academic year that we're going to have periods where they're roller coasters going up the hill. And that's generally as we moving into an exam session. And that's not necessarily unhealthy stress, remember that you're stressed is stress that you should be feeling. If you are serious about your studies. And if you want to perform well, it's entirely normal and natural to feel that anxiety growing slightly before an exam session, you know that

you're going to go into that exam, you're going to feel butterflies in your stomach, you're going to have sweaty palms, that sort of thing. That's normal stress. And it is most certainly not the job of a parent or a teacher to remove that stress from a child. That's our opportunity to teach children how to cope with stress, and how to handle stress. So that's normal stress. And the situation we're dealing with right now is I think that's becoming quite commingled with these bigger stresses, where our control is not to the same level.

Jax Aitchison 03:11

And maybe the pattern is slightly different this year, just because maybe coming down off that roller coaster peak, maybe we're just not getting back down off the trough to the level that we normally do. Maybe that's where our stress is plateauing, somewhat at a higher level than normal. And we need to ask ourselves, well, how do we manage that level of stress. And, you know, this is when we're aware of what's going on in our homes around us. Because we are stuck at home between COVID and the protests and everything that's going on, we are stuck at home more than we would normally be right now we're not even going to fill the car with fuel, we're not going to the shops. So we probably feeling more confinement, we probably feeling a little bit of Cabin Fever at times. And we need to be aware of things like having a 24 hour news channel on that when we do take a break from our work, we still seeing images of violence and protests, and we still hearing captions and you know, new speak about what's going on, which is not necessarily contextualized. Because we've just come in maybe on the back end of a news report. We need to be aware of the fact that we're all on community groups at the moment. So our phones are pinging more than normal. And we were having a there's a body language reaction that our children might be noticing, you know, we shake our heads or our head goes down in our hands or we make a comment on that. Our children are picking up on all of this. And generally it's out of context because they haven't read the message. They don't know why you've reacted that way. We need to be aware of the conversations as adults that children might be overhearing in the household because that's all going to add to the stress. More than ever. It's important that we have in conversations with our children and we reinforcing what we are doing to stay safe. We reminding them that they are

Jax Aitchison 05:00

In a home that is safe, and that we do take precautions, we have security companies and all this sort of thing that keeps us safe. These are the things we can control. And so we do control, we most certainly haven't told the students not to post on the class groups about what's going on. Because we do want to have conversations with them, they have been conversing during the classes, the teachers have been very good at allowing space and time in the classroom to voice concerns to voice fears. And we really need to just keep that sort of thing going, give the kids forums and platforms to express their anxieties so that we can provide context for them. And we can keep reminding them about what we can control, which is our exam, where we're in complete control of how much work we do and how much preparation we do for our own exams, and just reminding them where we can control the other bigger issues. So we're not gonna, you know, over post our videos and pictures and memes and that about what's going on, because that can be quite overwhelming. We're not going to say no, but we're going to be very careful about what's going on in that space. I think that's really, really important.

Gersh Aitchison 06:11

I think that in echoing what Mrs. Aitchison is saying that it's a great opportunity for us to exercise our critical thinking. And part of critical thinking is shutting off the sensationalism of the media. The media is the opposite of the Facebook life, where everything seems to be rosy and peachy, and full of highlights. The media always focuses on the worst of the worst, because that's what sells. So as Mrs. Aitchison said, you share ideas and thoughts with people, but certainly don't spam the groups and share the sensationalistic videos that are going around on social media, they're definitely contributing to the anxiety. And personally, I find myself on the different groups, just actually switching some of them off, especially the groups that are the most active, or just deleting some of those messages that I feel are just contributing to my own personal anxiety.

Jax Aitchison 07:02

You know, the reality of the situation is that we're in it, and we need to get through it. So we need to do whatever we have to do to make sure that we get through it intact. And that means being very, very cognizant of what we can handle and what we can't. So it's not negligent to be switching some of those groups off. It's actually just it's survival. At this point, it's keeping us all sane.

Gavin Kennedy 07:25

The initial two week level four lockdown was extended, what are the implications for exams and back to campus?

Gersh Aitchison 07:33

Well, given that's quite an easy question to answer, while a drink is guided by sauce and the government, and certainly we want to support the government's efforts, in curbing the spread of Corona as well as providing the medical services, the facilities, they need to actually combat the virus, we always make the decision in the best interest of our learners and the safety of our community. And right now, that's all bound up in COVID. And the additional stress of the chaos and looting that is happening around us at the moment. So the amended dates of coming back to school was mentioned by President Rama poza was the 26th of July. And that falls smack bang in the middle of our exam session. And part of what we would like to do is just keep some continuity going and some stability in our students lives. And what we're going to do is, we're going to do eye exams online this term, with a view of coming back in the last week of the term, being the second of August, to the sixth of August, so that at least we in the term with everybody together, everybody at school on campus again, and have that nice on campus vibe, while we review the exams and prepare ourselves for the winter holiday that's coming. Another consideration is that Adrian has spent a lot of time and resources on creating hybrid classrooms. And while they work very effectively, in the teaching process, it might be over complicated to invigilate some students at home and some students on campus while writing the exams. And given that some students are still going to be at home during the exam session for COVID related issues. It's easier for us and the teachers to invigilate everybody at home, and we had a successful exam session last year in July, and I'm looking forward to having another successful exam session in the same profession this year.

Gavin Kennedy 09:34

So last July exams at home with parents invigilating was a first try. A year later. You've got some experience, you've got some ideas of what you want to improve. What can parents expect from this exam session.

Gersh Aitchison 09:48

Ideally, we would like the parents to invigilate the exams and that is because it maintains the integrity of the exam. And more importantly, it gives the parents an insight into how the student Write their exams. And I think there's great value in that. But we do recognize that there are parents who are not able to do that. And we do realize that their parents are working. And that's fine. And we've got two mechanisms that we have in place, one for the parents invigilating, there's a form that they fill in verifying the integrity of the exam. And the second one is for the online invigilation by the teacher, the students after each exam, will complete a declaration of the authenticity and validity of their exam that they have to sign.

Jax Aitchison 10:35

In some instances, just to assist with this whole process, we have requested their parents set up an additional webcam, that allow the teacher to see the child screens as well as the child's face, so you're getting the two different angles at the same time. So don't be surprised if that request comes through. It's also just to assist us with that invigilation process and make sure that that integrity is retained.

Gersh Aitchison 11:02

And certainly there are one or two students who do not do online very well. And in that case, we might ask the parents specifically to have an adult invigilating the exam session to make sure that it does happen properly without a hitch.

Gavin Kennedy 11:19

The stressful time lots going on. However, it's exam time, and the fact that we're doing exams surely shows that things are to an extent under control.

Jax Aitchison 11:32

They definitely are given and I'm so glad you said that because and I say this, realizing that half the students will be rolling their eyes as I do say it. But the fact that our students are actually writing exams at the moment, amid all of this is such a positive thing. It highlights the level of stability that our kids are fortunate enough to have in their lives. The level of commitment that is displayed that is being displayed all the time from our staff, from our parents from our aging community as a whole is really summed up in the fact that at this stage of COVID, at this stage of what's happening in our country, we can actually administer an examination session that is completely valid, and has all the integrity that it needs to have at the level of an IB examination. I think it's a massively positive sign. And I think that every single one of us needs to give ourselves a huge pat on the back, that we have maintained this for our children over such a long period of time. I really think it's a huge, huge thumbs up for the whole aging community.

Gersh Aitchison 12:41

As most of the parents and students know, Mrs. He said I myself have walked a very different path to most school owners, Headmasters Headmistresses, we've had a very interesting life and have had very

interesting experiences on our journey. This is certainly one to add, as another chapter two that and it's certainly not something that we thought we would have to experience and make decisions about when we're envisioning the school, and what the school would look like 15 years ago. And I must say, given I'm very proud of the agent, community, my teachers and how hard they're working to make sure that teaching and school feels normal. I'm very proud of the students for rocking up in class every day, and doing what they need to do amidst all of this chaos. I'm very proud of the alumni who are supporting the school even though they're not in the school anymore, and sending great messages of encouragement. And I'm very proud of the parents who are supporting the school, the teachers, the students, the kids, to make sure that education is as uninterrupted as possible during this time. I'm very proud that as a community, we're still at school, that we've got exams coming. And I'm very proud that they're doing students are learning how to become, in the words of one of our alumni doing tough. That's about knowing what has to get done about resilience, about grit, doing what needs to get done, getting the job done. So thank you all for doing what needs to happen. And I look forward to seeing what the end of this term looks like. And I know you're going to do well in the exams, because I know you know how to work hard. Thank you. You've been listening to another production from Solid Gold Podcasts.