Adults

* It is hard for all of us to know the right thing to stay. That is ok.
* We are all feeling a full range of emotions right now … Fear – Sadness – Anger – Anxiety – Worry – Gratefulness – Empathy – Love
* These emotions are normal and healthy. The most important thing in processing our emotions is awareness.
* Thought awareness – we need to be aware and label the thoughts and feelings we have so that we can check them for accuracy and helpfulness.
  + For example, is my worry moving into a space that is debilitating and keeping me from doing positive things for myself and my family?
  + Are my angry thoughts becoming hurtful and creating a situation where I can’t focus. Emotions that become too “big” ultimately become unhelpful and unproductive.

How can we manage our emotions better and regulate them?

* **Label the emotion** – “I am feeling really sad about this right now.” For children it’s important to help them identify and label – this is a skill that is built.
  + For kids, it is great to label for them so they can develop their own feelings vocabulary. Praise them when they share a feeling… “You did a great job sharing your sadness with me.”
* **Define and understand** **it** – our thoughts influence our emotions. What am I thinking that might be part of what I am feeling. Are those helpful and accurate thoughts? Can I correct misunderstandings I am thinking to help me feel less (x)?" Are there typical situations that trigger my emotions that I need to understand better?
* **Reflect on my actions** – we feel our emotions in our body differently. Identify this as a cue for future understanding.
  + Example: butterflies in my stomach, tension in my neck, sweating, faster breathing, etc.
  + Are there areas being negatively impacted by my emotions? – Am I being shorter tempered? Am I easily frustrated? Am I having trouble sleeping?
* **Reframing** - Are there negative and unhelpful thoughts that I can shift my perspective on and change to a positive thought? Can I talk with someone to get a different perspective?
* **Healthy Coping -** What can I do to find a place of healthy comfort and coping? Pray! Lean into your relationship with God. Who has God put in my life that I can talk with?
  + What other healthy habits can I put in place to set myself up for success? Thinking about am I getting enough sleep, eating healthy meals, taking quiet time to pray, exercise, engaging in activities that bring me happiness, or spending time with others?

Understanding Stress response in our body:

* Our brain functions moves from our brain stem to the front of our brain, with the lower part being more basic functions to the top of our brain more executive functions.
  + Brain stem controls these automatic systems like heart rate, breathing, etc.
  + Lower brain controls motor function appetite, sleep, etc.
  + Middle brain controls hormones, emotional regulation, attachment, etc.
  + Front brain controls abstract thought, reasoning, problem solving, etc.
* Our brain develops in that order, from the basic to the complex. Children are still developing their middle and front brain as they grow.
* When we are in times of stress, we stop thinking with our executive thinking skills in the front brain and our functioning goes back down to the bottom for survival... you might have problem solving skills, but you can’t access them.
* This is why when you are angry, and you say something you wish you hadn’t. When you are calm you are able to pick the words and actions that are more appropriate and helpful.
* Something as simple as deep breathing or taking 5 minutes to pray, can change your physiological response to regulate your nervous system back.
* God made our bodies in such a way where our deep breaths and the mindfulness it takes to pray, literally heals our stress response. Amazing!

\*Parents\*

\*It’s important to show *healthy* emotions to your kids. It’s absolutely ok to show your emotions with them, but being careful we are not putting the burden of our emotions on our children.

\*The most important part of modeling healthy emotions is showing them how you manage them.

\*It’s great to show them how to appropriately show your emotions and regulate them.

\*Use other adults to process your own emotions though, not your children.

Children

* The above information is relevant for them, but with a few adjustments.
* Be available and follow their lead – answer questions honestly. Be sure to use simple language that your child can understand. Keep it simple. It’s ok to not know the answer… tell them you don’t know the answer to that, but you can figure it out together.
* Give them space to feel – they have all the emotions we have. Emotions, like with adults, come in waves. Be prepared to come in and out of this.
* Be patient. Often anxiety and sadness in kids can show up in a lot of other actions. They may act out of character or be more angry about something that seems small. When this happens, take the time to help them calm down and when they are calm, be available for them to share what might really be under those actions.
  + Regulation skills – these are the skills we use to calm ourselves down. We have learned things along our lives to help us calm down (deep breathing, taking a walk, stopping ourselves from thinking negative thoughts, talking to a friend)… Kids may be at all levels of the spectrum of skill. Meet them where they are and help them calm themselves. Just like adults, kids cannot fully share or process emotions when they are dysregulated.

Help them come up with a plan… let them come up with ideas and try to incorporate what you can.

* What can we do – when I feel sad? When I feel angry? When I feel scared?
* What would make you feel safe? Can you take something to remind you are safe?

Pray!!!!

God loves us, God is with us, God gives people the freedom to choose and sometimes that means that people make bad decisions that hurt others. He wants us all to have the freedom to choose because He loves us. God is sad too, especially when someone chooses to hurt others and ultimately not choose Him. We love each other, just as God loves us. We pray for God to comfort our hurting hearts and help us to see how we can help each other.

Shared with permission from Nikki Swann.