

Hello everyone,

All over the world students are waking up to find that some things are still the same and some things are very different. You probably have heard that there is a health crisis going on and getting back to normal will take some time. You may have asked your parents “How long will this last?” and they don’t have the answer yet. Many people are working very hard to get things back to normal and that is the best answer your parents can give you.

Meanwhile, many children have told me they are feeling upset. They want to know how to help themselves when their emotions get “too big” and they don’t have anyone to talk to. I know that talking to someone helps a lot. That is why I always tell children to find someone to talk to, even if that person doesn’t have all the answers. If you want to talk to someone your age, explore the options with your parents, such as using FaceTime to talk with a friend.

There are many ways to help yourself if you get upset and start feeling uncomfortable. You first need to be aware of how upset you are. There are two ways your emotions are telling you that you are getting upset. The first is how emotions are being felt in your body, like noticing that your stomach is feeling funny. The second is how emotions are affected by what is going on in your mind, like when you are thinking “I want everything to go back to normal right away and I’m upset that everyone is telling me I have to wait.”

There are tools you can use when your body and mind are telling you that you are upset and the feelings are too big to control. You may not know how to express those emotions in a way that makes you feel better (and doesn’t get you in trouble with the adults you’re with). Some kids have told me that when their emotions are too big, they feel like they are going to explode. When your emotions are too big you can make them smaller and keep them smaller by using two special types of tools. Think of a tool box with two drawers. One drawer has tools to help you **STAY** in control of those big emotions by lowering them. The other drawer has tools to keep you **STRONG** by keeping those emotions lowered. Say to yourself **STAY STRONG**.

These are the **STAY** tools to help you *quickly* get control of the big emotions

**S:** Soothe your emotions quickly by using your senses. Take a drink of very cold water, breathe in a strong scent like lemon juice, or take a deep breath and hold it for as long as possible.

**T:** Tense and relax your muscles by making believe you’re squeezing lemons. Or think of what a strand of spaghetti looks like before it’s cooked and after it’s cooked and tense and relax your body as if you’re that strand of spaghetti.

**A:** Activate your body to move. Run very quickly in place, you can even put on music. Stretch your muscles or do yoga to quiet music.

**Y:** Yell, but in a way that is soft and controlled. Try yelling into your pillow or your mattress or a stuffed animal. You can yell with your feet by stamping them. A soft, controlled yell is a safe way to reset your emotions.

These are the **STRONG** tools which you can use for as much time as it takes to keep your emotions lowered

**S:** Stop thinking about it. Say “no” or “stop” in your mind. Think about something else, like the beach or a snowy day, and imagine it in your mind. Look around your room and name everything in it. Play a “car game” like an “alphabetical visit to the store”.

**T:** Take your mind off your problems by thinking how you can help someone else. Help your parents cook. Read to younger siblings at home or FaceTime with a younger relative and read to them. Color a picture or write a letter to send to someone in the military.

**R:** Revisit a happy memory in your mind. Walk through the memory very slowly, carefully remembering all of the details. It could be a party, talking with a friend, a sports game.

**O:** Opportunities offline and online. When you can’t do what you normally do, take the opportunity to do something different. Set goals and start new hobbies. Learn something new, like a different language. Take “virtual trips” to new countries, museums, even the aquarium.

**N:** Notice the things in your life that haven’t changed. Family and friends. Enjoying activities you do together, like cooking, watching movies. Make a list of what you still have and read it over several times.

**G:** Get away from it all by finding a private space wherever you are. Read a book, listen to music, exercise, look at funny animal videos.

I hope you all STAY STRONG

Warmly,

Phyllis