



## Compassion Curve Series: Supporting Students During Distance Learning

Practicing trauma sensitive strategies are not only possible but can be very effective to support students and families who are facing new challenges to learn and thrive in a social-isolation, distance learning environment.

Drawing on [SaintA's Seven Essential Ingredients](#), a framework for practicing Trauma Informed Practices, this tip sheet offers an array of strategies to help you acknowledge the role that these stressful times may play on the wellbeing of children and families you work with – and give you practical tools to help.

We call this approach “[The Compassion Curve](#).” It represents how we engage the people in our care. When we act compassionately with each other and our families, and demonstrate compassion for the community, we see healing and resilience grow along the curve.

### **Ingredient 1: Prevalence**

Recognize that all students are likely experiencing some level of stress right now. However, for some that stress may be coming in large doses as they are reflecting the financial and emotional stressors of their caregivers. In some families, “safer at home” is not safe as incidents of abuse, domestic violence and substance abuse are on the rise.

#### ***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Conduct virtual check-in during learning roll call style or create a virtual poll. How are you feeling?
- When communicating with a student (web conference, phone email), notice if student appears angry, sad, or nervous.
- Create an on-line poll that has student rate their stress level
- Watching and listening for red flags on video (yelling, screaming, unsafe conditions, or unexplained student injuries)
- Host counselor or social worker as a guest speaker to do a social-emotional learning lesson

### **Ingredient 2: Impact**

Understanding that students may adapt to cope with current stress and adversity in a variety of way which may include irregular participation in learning, or responding to the educator with anger, frustration or disrespect.

#### ***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Now, more than ever we need to be curious about student experiences.
- Make referrals to school counselor or social worker for additional check in



- Support academic safety within distance learning (no group emails that list student names and missing work)
- Support emotional safety by watching for signs of [cyberbullying](#)

### **Ingredient 3: Perspective shift**

Understanding that students may adapt to cope with current stress and adversity in a variety of ways which may include irregular participation in learning, or responding to the educator with anger, frustration or disrespect.

#### ***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Remember, “Kids do well if they can” as Ross W. Greene, PhD, author of *The Explosive Child and Lost at School*
- Remember, “Don’t take it personally – it affects me, but it is not about me” (Eric Rossen, Director, National Association of School Psychologists)
- Prioritize student safety, health, well-being over academic workload
- Focus on innovation, not what is lost

**Ingredient 4: Regulation:** Dysregulation can be triggered by the current stressors that many students are facing. When students are in this state, they have less access to the parts of their brain in charge of planning, remembering, forward thinking or consolidation of concepts. Simply put, when a student is not regulated, no learning can take place.

#### ***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Begin class with a [grounding exercise](#)
- Assign [deep breathing exercises](#)
- Encourage rhythmic activity (ball bouncing, running, jumping jacks)
- Engage in coloring or drawing during the school day
- Take a group stretch break and have students touch their toes ten times
- Have students write a reflection of what is going on in their bodies before and after regulation activities

**Ingredient 5: Relationship:** Connection between human beings is essential, even in a virtual world. Resilience and healing happen in the context of relationship. Prioritize connection with students whenever possible.

#### ***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Share yourself – pets, kids, real background (not virtual)
- Help students to connect with each other through free time in breakout rooms
- Send note or email home with a picture



- Offer relationship coaching – teach apologizing and reflective listening (what I heard you say...)
- Keep trying, even if they do not respond

**Ingredient 6: Reason to be:** All students need to have a sense of purpose, belonging and hope for the future.

***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Forecast a positive future that includes transition back as well an innovation and new ways of learning
- Prioritize inclusion and hear all voices, not just the loudest ones
- Allow students to be helpful – assist in virtual class, arrange opportunities to read to / tutor a younger student

**Ingredient 7: Caregiver Capacity:** Students will take their cues from the important adults in their lives. Your self-care and well-being is essential for our students to thrive.

***Compassion Curve Strategies:***

- Experience beauty every day
- Remember to increase dosing of regulation
- Connect with loved ones outside of your home
- Reflect on your purpose
- Remember - You are enough!

## **About SaintA**

SaintA's mission is to facilitate equity, learning, healing and wellness by restoring the connections that help children and families thrive. We strive to address the impact of trauma, prevent adversity and promote resilience for the people in our care. Headquartered in Milwaukee, we empower people to overcome barriers to well-being – poverty, poor educational outcomes, unemployment and discrimination, to name a few – so they may thrive. SaintA serves 5,000 Wisconsin children, youth and adults each day, helping to build life skills, access needed resources and navigate systems of care. We use a framework that promotes the five pillars of stability and a trauma informed perspective.

Learn more at [sainta.org](https://sainta.org) and [sainta.org/trauma-informed-care](https://sainta.org/trauma-informed-care)