

Amy Terpening Abdo

Manlius Pebble Hill School

Our MISSION Is To Inspire Our Students To
Think Critically, Act Responsibly, And Discover
A Passion For Lifelong Learning.

My Background:

- University at Buffalo, Bachelors in English
- NYU, Masters in Education
- Independent School Educator for 17 years: Marymount, The Dalton School, MPH
- Teaching fourth grade at The Dalton School during 9/11 (lessons learned)
- Administrator: 3 years Assistant Head of MPH Lower School, currently Head of LS
- Parent of a 9-year-old third grader at MPH
- I'm still learning every day
- Gratitude for the support and perspective from my own parents, friends and family, and fellow educators.
- I feel very lucky to work with my colleagues at MPH!

VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO...

- MPH School Counselor, Joy Strickland (jstrickland@mphschool.org)
- MPH Curriculum Coordinator, Dr. Elizabeth Perryman (eperryman@mphschool.org)
- MPH Parent and Child Psychologist, Dr. Amy Gross. Amy has hosted professional development training with our LS faculty, and she has been a wonderful resource to me personally and professionally through the years. (agross14@aol.com)
- I am very appreciative of the time that Joy, Elizabeth, and Amy took to share their expertise with me in preparation for this presentation.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

We continually develop and reflect on strategies to build connections and support one another in meeting these critical psychological needs.

There have also been beautiful moments to celebrate along the way, as highlighted in the weekly MPH SnapShot communication.

Parents: Be sure to tend to your needs and secure your own "oxygen mask" first, before attempting to support your children.

Our Mission is to inspire our students to think critically, act responsibly, and discover a passion for lifelong learning.

Priorities shift in the midst of a pandemic, but these core values are still what guide our approach to our children and families.

In order for any mission to succeed, we must foster a stable foundation so, during this time, it is appropriate to focus on meeting our basic needs, because critical thinking and a love for lifelong learning will not happen if the nervous system is overly stressed.

Our distance-learning curriculum has intentionally emphasized not only academic content, but also social connection because we are educating the whole child. Opportunities to be helpful are the best antidote to anxiety and stress.

- MPH community members (students and adults) have been making and distributing masks.
- Upper School students recently reached out to MPH Alumni.
- Middle School students connected with residents of The Nottingham (Syracuse retirement community).
- Middle and Upper School students have volunteered their time to work with Lower School students.
- Third graders recently wrote and mailed letters to each student in the PreK.

MANLIUS PEBBLE HILL SCHOOL

Talking to kids about COVID19

The amount of information to share depends on the age of the child and on the family/child.

Work to “strike a balance between answering questions well without fueling the flame of anxiety.” (Harvard Health: Jacqueline Sperling, PhD)

- This can be achieved by checking in with the child periodically, in a general way, and answering their questions only as far as the question goes, not beyond.
- It’s also important to talk to children separately depending on their age, as the conversation would be different for 9-year-old than for his/her 5-year-old sibling.
- Keep in mind that many young children (1st grade and younger) will have anxiety/worries/concern about things more practical to them (ex: change in routine, no playing outside with friends, can’t hug those outside their household) that may have nothing to do with the virus directly. This is a typical and age-appropriate reaction for these younger children to be focused on the impacts within their world alone.
- Parents should be aware of information a child might overhear, either from other family members or on the news, and they should work to ensure that the child understands this information in an age-appropriate way, to prevent anxiety.
- Older kids and teens: ask them what news they are hearing / sharing on social media. What do they think about it? What are their concerns? (Whether they engage or not, you have established your openness to talk further when / if they are ready – and you have also strengthened the foundation of the pyramid – just be asking.)

HONORING A RANGE OF NEEDS

There is no singular “typical” family experience.

Needs will vary per person, per child, per family, and per day.

Kids already have a range of learning needs, that depend on their independence, stamina, and physical, social, and emotional well-being. Those needs are all amplified in a situation like this.

Give yourself permission to adjust expectations for yourself and for your child/children:

- If you/your child continues to hit the same wall, move the wall (it’s not a workable expectation during this time).
- It can be hard to recognize exactly when you/your child is hitting a wall. Hindsight is often 20/20 but taking stock, moment by moment can be a true challenge. Self-reflection through a conversation with someone trustworthy, meditation, and journaling can all help us to check in with ourselves during this challenging time.
- Never underestimate the power of be able to laugh.

There is no Pandemic Agenda. Our children are not falling behind. We are not falling behind. Typical things are all on pause as we tend to our basic needs.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

The child's experience of this may feel (to them) challenging and unnerving.

A child/teenager/adult cycling through a range of emotions is typical.

What Can Help Create A Sense of Security Through This Time?

- Clear routines, designated breaks and movement periods
- Structured social times with siblings or via Zoom/Facetime with friends
- Open communication for a child to comfortably share, "I don't like this" so that a parent can problem-solve with the child. During these conversations, help your child to name their feelings and validate what they share.
- When possible, provide your child with choices (within a range that is acceptable to the parent) to increase a sense of agency and power in an otherwise powerless time.
- Create an at-home Calm Place: work with your child/children to create specific, special places for calming down/feeling calm. Consider including fidgets such as silly putty, stuffed animals, coloring book, picture books, etc. (Items of the child's choice that will help them to relax.)
- Try to make weekends have a different feel and fluidity than weekdays, even while preserving helpful routines of mealtimes, bedtimes, etc.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

- Sensory Considerations: children will likely have increased sensitivity to bright lighting, loud sounds/noises, etc. (We're very aware of this in our LS classrooms.) Most children and teens are not able to self-regulate and filter these things out in the same way that an adult may be able to. A parent's awareness of the impact of sensory distractions can help to set-up a child to feel more comfortable.
- Never underestimate the positive impact of spending time outside, sharing in a good laugh, or enjoying some great music together.
- Importance of Self-Care: Children are watching how we as adults respond...be honest, be real, be compassionate.
- Don't hesitate to ask for support when needed: There is a wealth of valuable professional support available to families during this time. Please don't hesitate to reach out to your family Doctor or feel free to connect with me, Joy Strickland, Elizabeth Perryman, or Amy Gross to help facilitate you in that process.

- Be mindful of eating healthy and drinking plenty of water.
- Work to include daily physical exercise into the child/family routine.
- Children need frequent snack and movement breaks throughout the day. (Daily recess and PE have been a central part of their experience at MPH.)
- Plenty of Sleep: work to maintain a bedtime routine that begins with plenty of time for: (Ex's) bath/shower, reading, journaling (documenting history), meditation (apps), etc.
- Keep in mind the impact that screen time has on your child, especially those who enjoy screen games/shows for some period of time during the day, which is now on top of screen time from distance-learning.
- Consider creating a central space (kitchen?) where devices can charge for the evening so the family can “unplug” together.

PHYSICAL NEEDS

ACADEMIC NEEDS

- This is a challenging learning environment that is stressful for children and adults.
- MPH is working to offer positive opportunities to connect with teachers and other students within a supportive community.
- No child is falling behind: Take reassurance in knowing that we will build in plenty of review. It's what makes the most sense as a next step in any academic journey, after this unprecedented situation.
- For LS students, consider creating a simple positive reinforcement plan to add incentive and structure. Your child's LS Advisor and I would be happy to help with some suggestions/samples.
- Please feel free to connect with your child's teachers/Division Heads for help/support.
- Consider setting up Zoom/Facetime sessions with relatives to provide your child with some 1:1 support with someone outside of your home.
- Let me know if I can help to facilitate a connection between your child and a MS/US student volunteer to provide small group or 1:1 support for your child
- We're all (adults and children) doing the very best we can...each day. This is certainly not our typical "best" and that is absolutely okay, because we are all working to function in the midst of a pandemic.

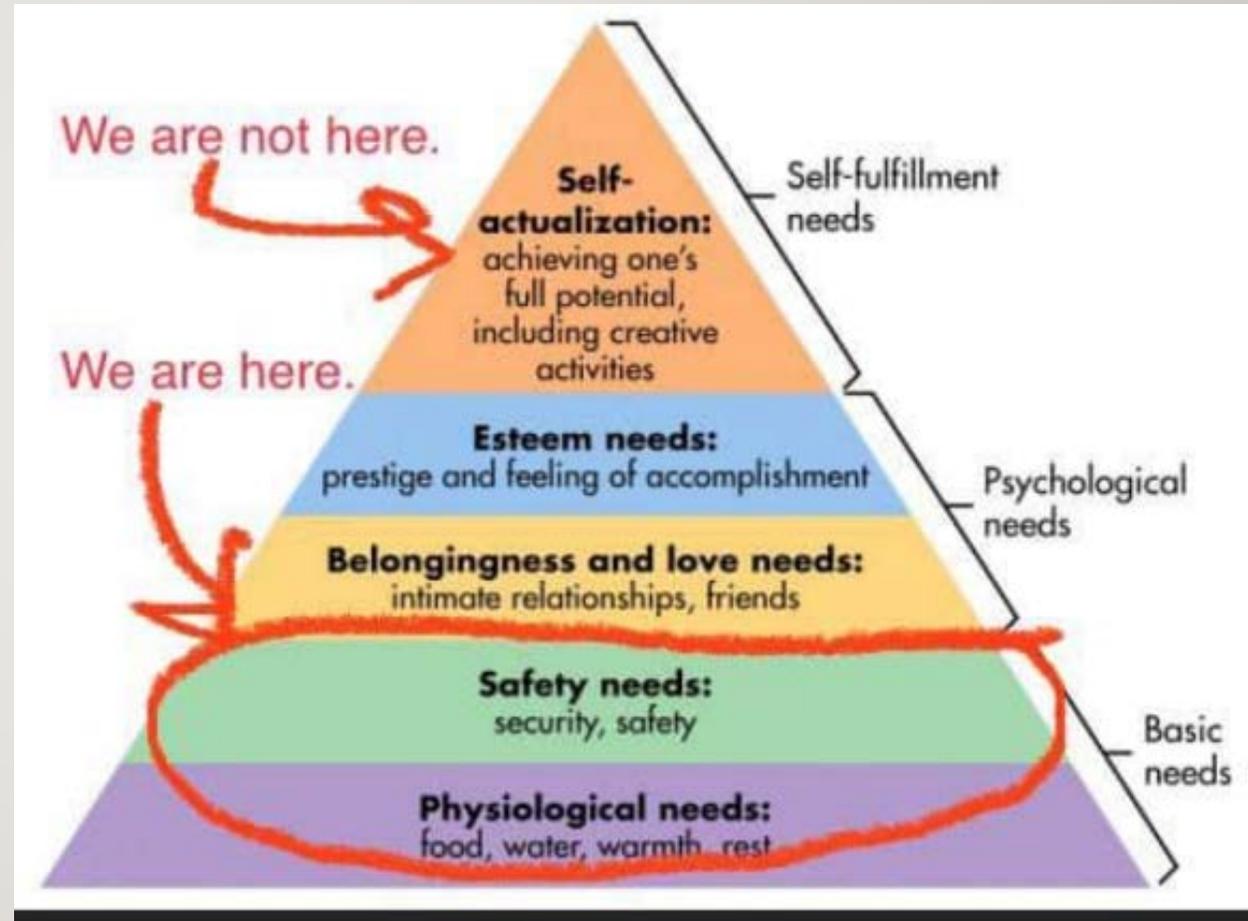
DISTANCE LEARNING AT MPH IN A PANDEMIC

Synchronous Learning: students engage in real-time meetings with teacher(s) and other students:

- Large groups (one grade/mixed grades)
- Small groups or 1:1 (when needed)
- Facilitate connections (within class and across grade levels)
- Teachers can answer student questions and explain concepts in real time
- Teachers may screen-share to walk students through assignments on Google Classroom, share a text, share group work, share a video, etc.
- MPH teachers are offering live meeting times with students daily (with multiple options throughout the day).
- PreK teachers are meeting (live) with students three times each week.
- These connections are vital and central to who we are at MPH. Although virtual, we're making the best of the options that we have in order to stay connected as a community.

Asynchronous Learning: students watch recorded videos posted by their MPH teachers at a time that works best for them/their family.

However, we cannot forget...



IMPACT OF STRESS ON LEARNING AND THE BRAIN

- Neuroteach (book all MPH employees are reading) by Glenn Whitman and Ian Kelleher: “Stress affects memory and...inhibits the everyday long-term memory formation that is crucial to learning.”
- Stress can affect the brain by interfering with memory, focus, the ability to tolerate frustration, motivation to try new things, and mood among other things.
- Expectations for how much a child can accomplish in one learning session or as a whole need to be specifically tailored to each child depending on his/her age, overall stress level, historical response to schoolwork, and any medical conditions which may in themselves interfere with learning but which could also be aggravated by stress (Ex: ADHD, anxiety disorders, asthma, epilepsy, etc.)



IMPACT OF STRESS ON LEARNING AND THE BRAIN

- We are now two months in, and stress levels have stayed elevated in our community. Realistically, we are looking at a prolonged period of collective and individual stress to come.
- Pacing is essential. This is a marathon, not a sprint, so we need to allow more, not less, time for de-stressing activities for adults and students alike.
- Healthy brain development happens when the overall nervous system is in homeostasis. Pushing too hard is counterproductive.
- In many ways, contrary to our typical tendencies, we'll need to slow down to speed up. (Downshift)
- At MPH, we have started conversations about the importance of pursuing faculty training and professional development to help our educators to best care for themselves and support our children/families as we move through this together.
- MPH Curriculum Coordinator, Elizabeth Perryman, has a a great deal of expertise in this area and she is looking forward to offering additional educational opportunities according to your specific interests and needs.



TECHNOLOGY

Students/Teachers/Parents Doing Some (Very Impressive) Fast Learning:

- Navigating Google Classrooms
- Navigating Zoom/GoogleMeet
- The students themselves deserve a lot of credit. Children as young as Kindergarten and first graders are showing that they can be nimble and competent.

Whole new world: everything needs to be explicitly taught/understood/reviewed with our students.

- Video meeting protocols: we're all learning together
- The confusion and feelings of being overwhelmed are something that children and adults alike are both experiencing.
- In the LS, we've done a great deal of talking/teaching about the benefits of a growth mindset. This was never more relevant than it is right now.

A desk or table
in your home....

The new
“classroom”

- When possible, try to set up your child in a quiet, separate space in your home.
- Ideally, this is not the same spot as a Calm Space you may create or their bed....so that calming down and sleeping can have their own spaces.
- Help your child organize: have all needed items at the space (pencils, paper, books, whiteboard, eraser, etc.) so they're not needing to get up and down during the Zoom.
- Headphones with a microphone are ideal.
- Under typical circumstances, parents aren't in classrooms with their kids. Parents of younger children needing to be nearby to help with tech issues is certainly understandable but please take into consideration that parents who listen to their child and weigh-in (during class) can add a layer of discomfort and pressure for the child that is an additional challenge in an already challenging situation.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

Many, many aspects of this have been very challenging. However, we've seen countless examples of nimble and creative faculty, caring and patient parents, and, overall, the kids have adapted in so many ways. Their flexibility/resilience/creativity needs to be recognized and celebrated.

There are also some lessons here....which students are thriving in ways that might surprise us? Why? (Edutopia article)

- Benefits of self-pacing
- Time to rethink the over-extended kid
- Lowering the stakes
- Reducing social stressors
- Getting more sleep

What's working?

- PreK Painting Together
- PreK-12 Stings students playing Twinkle together
- 5th grade students are creating, writing, filming, and sharing their play....all virtually.

Looking Ahead....

- How can we apply this new knowledge to our future to revitalize and strengthen our approach to teaching and learning?

LOOKING AHEAD.....

Recent Letter to Families from Division Heads:

“Despite this distance, our students and teachers remain connected. We are a strong community and that has never been more evident than during this last month and a half. “

- We will continue to pause, reflect, revise, pivot, and proceed, learning and growing all along the way so that we don't just survive this pandemic, but, instead, build the resilience and creative capacities to thrive as we move ahead.
- As many of you know, this is a priority for us at MPH, this full acknowledgement of the **WHOLE CHILD**, who is inspired to *think critically, act responsibly, and discover a passion for lifelong learning.*

THANK YOU!

Please don't hesitate to ask questions or connect with me directly at:
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RESOURCES

MPH School Counselor, Joy Strickland jstrickland@mphschool.org

MPH Curriculum Coordinator, Elizabeth Perryman eperryman@mphschool.org

MPH Parent and Child Psychologist, Amy Gross agross14@aol.com

Harvard Health Blog: How to Talk to Children About Coronavirus:

- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>

Why Are Some Kids Thriving During Remote Learning?

- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/why-are-some-kids-thriving-during-remote-learning>

Neuroteach: Brain Science and the Future of Education by Glenn Whitman and Ian Kelleher