

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | Aug. 4, 2020

Back-to-school resources are available for parents and caregivers during the pandemic

BISMARCK, N.D. – Starting a new school year is a stressful time under the best of circumstances, let alone during a pandemic. The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division has a new resource available to help parents and caregivers in supporting children with back-to-school plans, whether that means returning to school full time, distance learning or a hybrid model. The new Parents Lead resource can help guide conversations with children to better prepare them for this school year.

"Even with all the uncertainty, parents and caregivers can prepare their kids with healthy skills before returning school," said Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness. "Depending on age, these things can include setting expectations around handwashing, walking through different scenarios like returning to school but wearing a mask or distance learning plans."

The new Parents Lead resource encourages parents and caregivers to provide a space for their child to talk about their questions and concerns, be honest about what to expect and lead by example.

Sagness suggests instead of highlighting what not to do, parents and caregivers can provide alternative behaviors for their children, such as a fun wave instead of a hug or pointing out the positives in situations that may be different, like eating lunch in the classroom.

"School leaders, parents and caregivers must make difficult decisions regarding back to school this year," she said. "Thank you to all parents and caregivers for working to ensure students are prepared for this school year while being ND Smart."

Parentslead.org offers resources and tips on:

- Preparing your child for changes they could face when starting school this fall, such as face mask requirements, distanced seating or eating places and hybrid schedules.
- Reassuring them that these measures are in place to keep everyone healthy.
- Finding out as much as possible about what the school has planned, so you can prepare your kids and yourself.
- Outlining, as best as you can, what their new daily routine will be, and how drop off and pick up will go.
- Practicing washing your hands together and applying hand sanitizer as this will be an even bigger part of their daily routine.
- Talking to them about the positives of attending school – however that looks – emphasizing the importance of flexibility.

- Helping your child identify strategies to remain healthy, which can provide a sense of control and reduce feelings of anxiety.
- Encouraging your child to vocalize their thoughts and feelings by checking in with them regularly.
- Reminding your child and yourself, their school will do everything it can to keep everyone safe.

Visit www.parentslead.org for this information and more.

Parents Lead, a North Dakota program administered by the department's Behavioral Health Division, provides parents and caregivers a variety of tools and resources to support them in creating a safe environment for their children that promotes behavioral health. This is especially important throughout all the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another source of support during the pandemic continues to be Project Renew, a partnership between the department, the division and Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. It provides services for North Dakotans to help them understand physical and emotional reactions to COVID-19, develop and improve coping strategies, review options and connect with other individuals and agencies that may be of assistance. The Project Renew hotline can be reached at 701-223-1510 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. Individuals can also send an email to renew@lssnd.org.

Through Project Renew, Lutheran Social Services is offering a free, online group discussion about navigating the parenting challenges created by the pandemic titled, "Parenting in a Pandemic" on Aug. 13, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. CT. Visit Lutheran Social Services' Facebook page for more information and to register at <https://www.facebook.com/LutheranSocialServicesND/>.

The division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety, access to services and quality services. It also establishes quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information visit www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov.

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