National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Department of Psychology LABORATORY OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

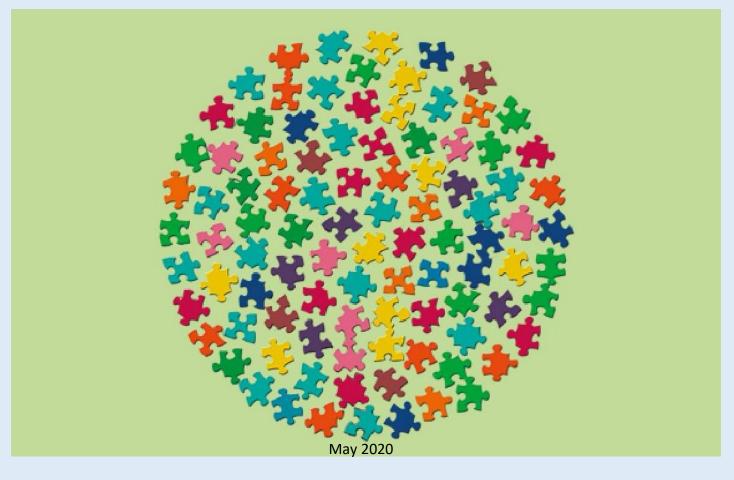
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# **Return to the school**

# And fostering psychological resilience after the stay-at-home period of the COVID-19 pandemic

Useful tips and activity worksheets



#### Dear colleagues,

We are experiencing very unique circumstances, under which we are called to constantly adjust to new conditions, in regards to our personal and family life, as well as in our professional role. Regarding the educational process, we have attempted to make use of distance learning opportunities in order to maintain contact with our class and our students, overcoming various constraints (teaching course material, class dynamics, relationship with students, social and emotional aspects of learning). Currently, with the re-opening of schools, we are returning to a new, unprecedented experience of the classroom, whilst carrying our personal burden after the at-home confinement and the multiple roles that we had undertaken. Multiple issues need to be resolved (e.g., following hygiene rules, administrative and organization issues, continuing the curriculum material, dividing the classrooms, student absences, etc.). Moreover, we are concerned about the psychosocial adjustment and recovery of our students, as well as for how we can support them through our role as educators- as significant others.

In our effort to respond to the emerging needs in every stage of the difficult situation we are all experiencing, we developed a series of six resources for schools and families, that has had a great impact (over 230.000 readings at the website of the Laboratory and on social media) (http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-08-17-58-59).

The present document has been developed as a continuation of the aforementioned effort, in order to facilitate the transition to school and to strengthen emotional bonds between students, after the period of school closures and distant learning.

Our underlying aim is to support children by encouraging the socio-emotional aspects of the learning process through the promotion of student resilience, as well as our own. In this context, key points and useful tips regarding managing the team and supporting the students through the transition and reconnection in the classroom are presented. Based on these key points, activity worksheets are provided, which you could use together with your students, in order to support them more effectively. We hope that this effort will function supportively to your undergoing work during this period, which pertains to helping children during these challenging times with sensitivity, creativity, and lots of hard work.

We hope to return to our familiar classrooms soon, where we feel safe, where we create and coexist with our students, connected at present, for their future.

Chryse (Sissy) Hatzichristou, Ph.D Professor of School Psychology Director of the Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

# Useful tips for the return to the school after the stay-at-home period of the COVID-19 pandemic

The return to school in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an unprecedented experience for the students, their families, and all the members of the school community. The psychosocial adjustment to the new circumstances and the psychological recovery will happen in a gradual manner, through the coexistence of all the members within the school community, while following protective and safety measures.

The strengthening of resilience, that is the ability to make use of our strengths, both personally and within our environment, in order to face and overcome adverse experiences in our lives, is especially important during this period.



# A. Resilience in the classroom: Promoting key aspects of resilience

Below, useful remarks for the period that students are gradually returning to school are provided, in regards to the activation and enhancement of key aspects that contribute to the promotion of student resilience.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**



WE RECONNECT in a new reality and new conditions, with a focus on relationships. Human contact and our relationships with others provide a sense of belonging in a group, a sense of receiving and providing support, and a sense that we are not alone in difficult times. With the return to the classroom, it is important to convey the message that the classroom serves as a team, where there is Thoughtfulness, Mutual Support, and Care, even during difficult times.

- → We welcome students by connecting our co-existence in the classroom in a different manner since school closures, the experience of distance learning, and the fact that they are together again.
- → We discuss the differences in our classroom as a "team" or "group", between the time before school closure, during the period of distance learning, and at present, during the gradual return to school.
- → Flexibility: We help students acknowledge the importance of relationships and that of the adaptability of the team in difficult situations and under different conditions.
- → We take into consideration that there are differences between students in regards to the distance learning experiences due to different levels of student participation, considering that not all students had help and support from their families, not all students had access to the necessary technological equipment and that from those that did have access, some had to share equipment with other family members. We acknowledge that these facts as normal and expected, and we avoid any judgment regarding student presence or absence in distance learning.
- → We explain that the decision that some students and their families might have taken to not return to school is respected and that in any family there might be important and serious reasons that we are not aware of and we must respect, preventing in that way any judgment or stigmatizing attitudes.
- → We try to maintain the ties and cohesion of the class, despite the adjustments that we had to make due to protection and safety measures. For example, students that attend class on different days and students that have possibly not returned to school could develop communication bridges through a bulletin board, where they post their

responses and coursework on topics that were discussed or presented in the classroom (see Our stories in our classroom again- general guidelines to make use of the worksheets).

### **SELF-CONFIDENCE/ IDENTIFICATION OF STRENGTHS**



WE re-evaluate and focus on identifying and acknowledging our personal strengths and those characteristics that helped us make it.

Believing in oneself and our personal sources of strength help people bounce back from difficulties sooner and more

effectively. The connection with previous experiences of success as well as of managing and overcoming difficulties contributes to the realization of personal strengths and skills, and thus to regain a sense that "we will make it".

→ We discuss with students the characteristics that helped us make it in difficult times, which of these characteristics we utilized during the confinement and what we think will help us know (see Worksheet 1).

### **SOURCES OF SUPPORT**



We re-examine and make use of our sources of support on every level within our environment. It is important to be able to identify and acknowledge those elements in our lives that give us strength (sources of support), whether these are people or conditions/situations. When facing difficulties, these sources may prove to be valuable assets that will allow us to gather our strengths and move on.

- $\rightarrow$  We discuss with our students about
- the people that helped us make it through difficult times and in which way they did so
- our contribution/ support to others
- how classmates can work supportively to each other during this period (physically and psychologically) (see worksheet 1)

→ Here, it is important for students to acknowledge the role of the teacher as a "significant other" for the children, a person who can work supportively through both his/her relationship with his/her students and by modeling helpful coping strategies in difficult situations and providing support to others.

### **Responsibility/Active Participation**



We go over the possibilities and opportunities for taking initiative in the school setting. The feeling that we are taking responsibility for our actions can help us gain a sense of control over things and stay calm. This is especially important for the youth who feel they are actively participating in school activities but also for all members of the school community.

- → We are available and responsive to the need to discuss and share challenges related to the current everyday school life. We listen attentively, we help the youth express their feelings, understand the current events, and refute any rumors or misconceptions.
- → Taking into account the special circumstances of this period we are experiencing, we discuss with the youth and ask them to share thoughts and suggestions on ways they could contribute to the compliance with the prevention and protection measures at the classroom and school level (e.g., brochures, information campaigns, letters to services, etc.) and if they want to visualize them with sketches, etc. (see Worksheet 3).

### Values/Expectations



We re-evaluate and support our core values and beliefs that lead our choices and actions. Our awareness and deeper understanding of the values we stand for helps us with selecting our priorities, set our goals, and pursue the realization of our goals with stability and consistency.

- → We discuss with the children what is important to them in the current phase and what are their priorities for the next time period. In our discussions, we include topics such as hygiene rules, behavior, cooperation, teamwork, friendship, and other values.
- → We can also discuss what is important for their classroom and what are our current priorities as a "team" (see Worksheet 2).

### Goals



We re-establish and prioritize our new goals within the context of the new conditions and based on our emerging needs. These goals must be within the capability limits of each individual, short-term, realistic and achievable, and flexible so as to adjust along the way. When circumstances change, it is important to be able to revise one's goals and adjust them, to continue to derive satisfaction and give meaning to their life.

- → We identify, we observe, we understand, and we try to support the various needs of our students as they arose after the school closures and distance education.
- We invite the class to actively participate and discuss what are our basic needs as a team at the moment, selecting priorities and class-level goals (e.g., health, mood, lessons/curriculum content, social interactions, etc.) (see Worksheet 1 and Worksheet 2).

### **Optimism and Positivity**



We repeat to our students that what matters in our lives is the experiences we gain. We find opportunities to share that for the pleasant but also for the unpleasant moments we experience, we have people next to us that can help and support us. We encourage the students to realize how important it is to believe in themselves, to use their sources of support, and to make

dreams about the future.

- → We discuss the transition to the next grade/educational level, and we encourage the students to share potential concerns but also expectations for the next steps in their lives.
- → We discuss with students about their dreams and thoughts for the future, plans for the summer, and, generally, we encourage discussions with a focus on the future that create a sense of hope and optimism which are important aspects of psychological resilience.
- → We "finish" the school year by recounting the school everyday life, from start to finish, focusing on moments during which we were able to identify core life values (e.g., kindness, gratitude, patience, solidarity, etc.) (see Worksheet 4).

# B. Educators' psychological resilience/ Taking care of caregivers



Student care and support is a constant and fundamental concern of all educators. However, it is important to recognize that we too face the same difficult circumstances, each of us in his/her own way.

We are likely to experience our own difficulties, but also the same or similar feelings and thoughts with our students. Thus, it is important to take care of ourselves in order to be able to take care of our students too. We need to remember that:

- → We take care of ourselves and boost our psychological resilience through our support networks.
- → We give "space" and time to ourselves and we move forward with small, realistic goals while making sure to use our own strengths and sources of support at all levels.
- → We share and express feelings, thoughts, and concerns. The exchange of feelings with others often can make people feel more connected and safer.
- $\rightarrow$  We take care of our personal health (diet, sleep, exercise).
- $\rightarrow$  We recognize that our own adjustment to the new reality takes time.
- $\rightarrow$  We seek the care and support of our loved ones (family, friends, relatives).
- $\rightarrow$  We maintain elements of a routine that can help us relax and decompress.
- ightarrow We avoid making important decisions until we bounce back from the situation.
- → We seek professional help when we feel intense physical and/or psychological burdens in our everyday life.

# C. Psychological resilience at the school level: Participatory cooperation at the school level

Within the school context, the cooperation and the creation of groups for the coordination and implementation of activities based on the needs of each school unit are very helpful.

- → At school, regarding prevention and management issues as mandated by the official guidelines, we discuss and decide on practices and activities as well as deliberate on ways to develop and implement them.
- → We share the same information and updates in regards to student concerns (curriculum, school year extension, etc.) that contributes to a sense of security.
- → We encourage the active participation of students in the context of classroom activities and at the school level regarding prevention measures.
- → We examine, recognize, and understand the learning and psychosocial needs of all students while also taking into account the needs of those students who are not coming back to school (e.g., for any reason, if there were losses in the family, etc.). We

collaborate at the school level to find potential ways to support student vulnerable groups.

- → We recognize and understand the needs of our team members, our colleagues, and we support each other.
- → We stay connected during the process of re-evaluating needs, sharing, and capturing these new experiences along with the potential redesign of activities during this crisis period.
- → We discuss and stay mindful of a flexible and adaptable to the new reality way that the school year will "end", by involving the whole school community (e.g., create, present and/or sending to all students a document that may include photos, videos from school celebrations, everyday school moments and/or snapshots from the distance learning times, optimistic messages, wishes that may have been collected from all students for this occasion).

# D. Psychological resilience, Psychological reactions, and Recovery

It is important to remember that everyone reacts differently to the same circumstances and that challenges affect our socio-emotional well-being and behavior in various ways. The provision of support, especially to vulnerable students, is particularly important at this stage to promote and empower their psychological resilience and facilitate their recovery.

Children's and adolescents' anticipated psychological reactions

Children and adolescents, after a prolonged period of staying at home, while experiencing significant changes in multiple levels of their learning and psychosocial development, are likely to exhibit behaviors such as disorganization, withdrawal, agitation, difficulty concentrating, increased conflict, somatization symptoms, provocative/risk-taking behaviors and are likely to feel intense anxiety, stress, anger. However, these possible reactions are considered typical and expected in the unprecedented circumstances we are going through.

In case such behaviors persist in terms of intensity, frequency, and the level of disruption to the everyday functioning of children, it is important to inform the family and recommend that the student receives professional help from mental health providers or we reach out to the school psychologist if our school has one.

### **Recovery**

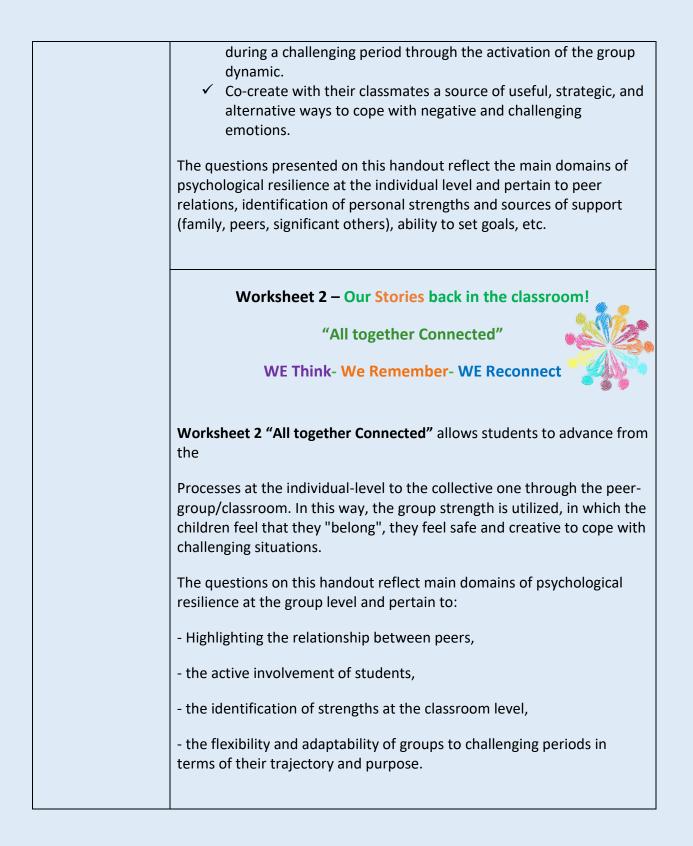
In the long run, most children and adolescents will be able to respond and cope psychologically despite the challenging experiences they have encountered by developing and/or evolving internal mechanisms for dealing with challenging situations while receiving guidance and support from their parents and other important adults.

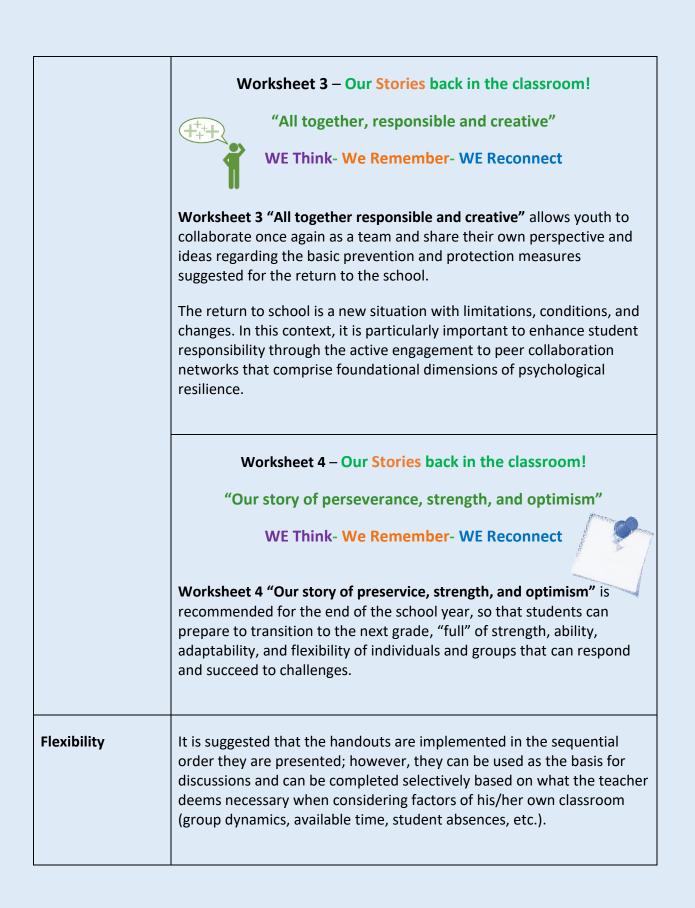
# **Our Stories back in the Classroom**

Activity handouts that aim to promote students' psychological resilience when schools re-open during the COVID-19 pandemic

General recommendations for using the Handouts

Objective	<ul> <li>The handouts "Our STORIES back in the Classroom" have as a general objective to promote psychological resilience at the student and classroom level by:</li> <li>✓ enhancing and using internal strengths, motives, and abilities at the student and classroom level.</li> <li>✓ Understanding concepts that contribute to the creation of a class environment in which members of the group can manage a crisis, show solidarity, and teamwork, can act and evolve.</li> </ul>
Structure	<ul> <li>The handout content pertains to domains that can boost students' psychological resilience in the classroom environment, as described in the useful tips/recommendations section.</li> <li>It is recommended that the following four printed handouts are presented in a gradual order, initially at the individual/student level and, then, at the classroom level. The final handout to use will be the handout that pertains to the end of the school year.</li> </ul>
Purpose/Content	Worksheet 1 – Our Stories back in the classroom!         "My personal story of perseverance and strength"         WE Think- We Remember- WE Reconnect         Worksheet 1 "My story of perseverance and strength" allows students to:         ✓ Discover their own strategies that can help them adjust to
	<ul> <li>challenging situations.</li> <li>✓ Exchange positive messages and practices which can help them cope emotionally with feelings they may have experienced</li> </ul>





Classroom cohesion	<ul> <li>We remember that the classroom began as a group and it is important to try to maintain group cohesion while also acknowledging the measures and limitations in place aiming to protect youth and educators when they return to school.</li> <li>All students can't be physically present and because of that it is</li> </ul>
Important!	<ul> <li>All students can't be physically present and because of that it is recommended that each handout generates a separate space/bulletin board where students will have the opportunity to post anonymously their work (like a puzzle).</li> <li>It is important to incorporate content/handouts and from both subgroups of the same classroom that attend school on different days as well as from youth that are not physically attending school (those students can send their submissions electronically, then print and post their work on the bulletin board).</li> </ul>

# Our stories back in the classroom!

# "My personal story of perseverance and strength"

WE Think- We Remember- WE Reconnect

## WE Think

### People have the ability to manage difficult situations, and this ability results from

- all the little everyday moments that we enjoy
- the moments when we feel that we have responded or are responding to difficulties, by utilizing personal characteristics and help from others.

Next, try to identify your own personal strengths throughout this experience, to create your own personal "guide" of perseverance and strength in difficult times. Remember that our lives have both pleasant and difficult moments and people have or find the strength to enjoy nice moments and adjust to difficult ones.

### WE Remember

### During the stay-at-home period:

The moments that I enjoyed the most or felt good were.....

The thing that was the hardest for me during this period was....

When I felt.....

I tried to.....

.....

The person/people that helped me was/were....

It was helpful for me to think that....





One thing I learned about myself was....

.....

WE Reconnect in the classroom
At the moment:
I like/enjoy
The thing that is hard for me or worries me the most is
When I feel
I try to
During difficult times in my life:
The personal characteristics that help me through are
It is helpful for me to think that
I ask for help from (people)
To my classmates, when they face difficulties, I suggest
My next goals are
For the days that follow and until the end of the school year, it is important in our classroom to
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# Our stories back in the classroom!

# "All together Connected"

# WE Think- We Remember- WE Reconnect

- In difficult times, our group help each other feel better and "make it through".
- Our class is a team, which is important to us and has its own strengths and difficulties.

Especially during this period, things are somewhat different; however, we, all together, can think, remember, and create a new plan with adjustments, without stopping to hope and

create!

## WE Think

In general:

In my class, I feel good when...

The strengths of my class are....

# We Remember

During the period of distance learning, the thing that was useful for me was...

because ....

.....

During distance learning, the thing that was hard for me was...



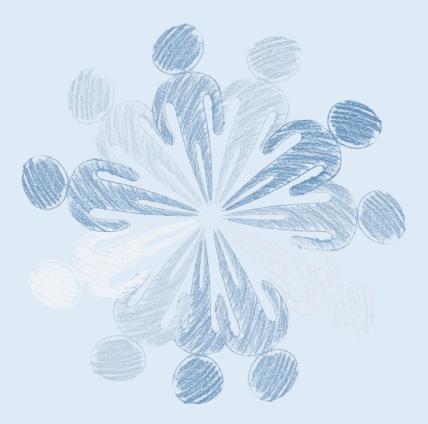
### **WE Reconnect**

At the moment, in our class, it would help me to....

At the moment, in our class I would like for all of us together to achieve.... I would like our next priorities in our class to be...

Each person in our class can be helpful to the rest of the group in the following ways...

.....



# Our stories back in the classroom!

# "All together, responsible and creative"

# WE Think- We Remember- WE Reconnect

- Following the basic protective and preventive measures for this period of time that we will be in school is a key priority for our health.
- We have always known and tried to follow basic hygiene rules.
- For the upcoming period, we have to learn and adopt certain new habits that will protect us.

What are the basic hygiene and protective measures in the classroom and during recess?

How can we contribute together in following the protective measures in class and during recess?

How can we contribute as a group to the compliance with and remembering of the protective and preventive measures in our school and in our classroom in a creative way?

 F



# Our stories back in the classroom!

# "Our story of perseverance, strength, and optimism"

# WE Think- We Remember- WE Reconnect

This year has been a special school year for us all.

However, each of us is unique and we have experienced this situation in our own unique way. Our dreams and thoughts for the future are also unique. Let's remember what we want to keep from this school year that will make us stronger, and let's dream about our future.

In our class, we succeeded in		Enjoy the summer
I liked		
My dreams and goals for the fut	1	
From this school year, it gives m	e strength to remember that	

# Useful resources for crisis management and psychosocial support in the school community during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

## **Resources for schools/ teachers (Translated into English)**

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Re-Connecting to the School: e-stories in the classroom. Useful tips for the transition to online classrooms/distance learning and the management of conversations that may arise regarding the challenging times we experience & Activities that aim to strengthen social and emotional connections in the online environment in order to promote resilience during school closures happening due to the global pandemic. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Re-ConnectingtotheSchool-inclass-activities.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3048809525206181

### In Greek

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/epanasyndeomaste-sto-sxoleio-e-istoriesdrastiriotites-stin-taksi-COVID-19.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2933471006740034

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020).Supporting and Discussing with children and adolescents about COVID-19: Useful tips for teachers and schools. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/school-based-psychological-support-about-covid19.pdf

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/school-based-psychological-support-aboutcovid19.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2913785252041943

### In Greek

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/psychologiki-stirixi-st-sxolei-giakoronoio\_covid19.pdf

## **Resources for families (Translated into English, German, French)**

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020).WE stay at home... WE stay connected. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English). http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/WE-stay-at-home-WE-stay-connected.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2924651767621958

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http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/menoumespitisyndedemenoi--psichologikistirixi-gia-oikogeneies.pdf

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Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragkiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Reconnecting at home: Our stories. Activities that aim to strengthen social and emotional connections in the family in order to promote resilience during school closures happening due to the global pandemic. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/reconnecting-at-home-our-stories.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3048825068537960

### In Greek

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https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2957230044364130

### In German

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragkiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). WIR bleiben zu Hause ... WIR bleiben overburden. Coronavirus - Covid-19: Ratschläge zur psychologischen Unterstützung von Familien, Kindern und Jugendlichen während des Aufenthalts zu Hause. Athen: Labor für Schulpsychologie, Nationale Kapodistrias-Universität Athen. <u>http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Wir-bleiben-zu-Hause-Wir-bleiben-verbunden.pdf</u>

### In French

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragkiadaki, D., &A thanasiou, D. (2020). Restons chez nous... proches de nos process. Info utiles pour le soutien psychologique des familles, des enfants et des ados pendant la période de confinement Covid-19 (Coronavirus). 'Athènes: Laboratoire de psychologie scolaire, Université nationale et capodistrienne d'Athènes.

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Restons-chez-nousproches-de-nos-proches.pdf

www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3049797828440684

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about COVID -19. Useful tips for parents. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/psychological-support-from-parents-abooutcovid19.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2916701468416988

In Greek

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/psychologiki-stirixi-paidiwn-apo-goneis-giakoronoio-covid19.pdf

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## Indicated articles- International references

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-08-17-58-59

Translated into English by Dr.Lito Eleni Michalopoulou and Dr.Niki Georgakakou



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http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/

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# Resources for the psychosocial support for COVID-19

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/2020-03-08-17-58-59

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