



June 2021

Special Points of Interest

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SSSD INSIDER

Term III – Academic Year 2020/2021

Manager’s Remarks: Professor Dennis Conrad

What a school year it has been!!! Covid-19 continues to impact our education system in ways we are yet to determine.

The pandemic has affected not only our sense of well-being but how we learn, work, and live. For Student Support Services, one main challenge remains how to adapt ourselves and the system of education, which was built around physical schooling and interaction, to one that engages, with or without technology. The related school closures present major threats to individualized education for many of our most marginalized students. Such threats are not limited to academics. Negative effects on students’ sense of belonging and their self-worth, and the subverting of critical relationships between some students and adults, are also consequences.

Despite these challenges, we must **NOT** despair or give in to the negative. If ever there was a time, it is now that we must evidence *discipline, collegiality, flexibility, respect* and *value* for one another, along with a readiness to collaborate and seek solutions that are culturally relevant and localized.

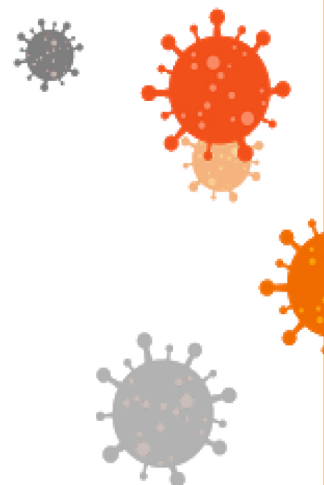
Wishing you a progressive end of term and a rejuvenating July/August. Practice self-care and watch out for each other.

Appreciations to the editorial team!

Reminder from the Ministry of Health:

Managing Your Behavioural Health During the Covid-19 Pandemic

- **Manage a daily routine.**
- **Try relaxing with daily exercise, new hobbies, prayer, and meditation.**
- **If you feel overwhelmed, seek help by talking to a friend, health worker, or counsellor.**
- **Stay connected with friends and family.**
- **Start each day with gratitude.**



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children, Covid-19 Pandemic and the Return to Physical School

Trauma is a psychological response to a distressing or disturbing event through direct experience, witnessing or learning that it occurred to a close relative or peer. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is classed within the diagnostic category of trauma. It can be induced by a distressing event that includes threatened or actual physical harm. Directly contracting the Covid-19 virus or other serious illness can be considered traumatic events. Others include:

- Witnessing or being a victim of crime or violence
- Death of family member or friend
- Natural disaster
- Accident
- Serious illness
- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Domestic abuse

The pandemic may have exposed children to PTSD-inducing traumatic events. It is important to note, however, that not every child who experiences a traumatic event develops PTSD. Children displaying symptoms of PTSD may be misunderstood and misdiagnosed because these symptoms may be similar to disruptive and undesirable behaviours seen within the home and classroom.



Recommendations for providing support:

- Understand and identify the symptoms of PTSD
- Refer student to the School Based Intervention Team (SBIT)
- Consult SSSD personnel for further support
- Teach social and emotional competence
- Keep calm and provide a reassuring presence
- Create a safe space for student to express themselves (write, talk, draw, etc.)

Sensitization on Good Touch / Bad Touch

Child abuse can include, but is not limited to, physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen which can result in harm, the potential to cause harm, or the threat of harm (ttchildren.org).

As a preventative strategy, the Guidance and Social Work Units within the Student Support Services conduct sessions with individual classes and selected groups, respectively. Students at the Primary School level are sensitized on what is considered to be a 'good' touch versus a 'bad' one. The aim is to align the psychosocial development of boys and girls with the clear understanding of proper and improper touching. Therefore, critical communication skills are taught so that students are comfortable to discuss this sensitive issue.

Students learn:

- The cues and signs used to classify different 'touches', body-safety rules.
- The protocols which must be followed if there are breaches to these rules.

School Social Workers also conduct sessions where parents and guardians are equipped with skills to support the efforts of the school in dealing with this form of sexual abuse. They learn:

- How to be alert and attentive to their children.
- Trust building techniques as a means of enhancing interactions between parent and child when addressing this delicate issue.

Students can also discuss their experiences personally with the School Social Worker and are provided with coping mechanisms., such as individual and group counselling sessions.

During this period of online learning, some students may find themselves at home vulnerable to sexual predators. Parents and teachers must play a greater role in ensuring that all of our students remain safe and report any incidents to the Student Support Services Division.



GOOD TOUCH

A good touch is:

- A hug from someone you trust
- A pat on the back
- Holding hands with a friend
- A good touch makes you feel happy and comfortable

BAD TOUCH

A bad touch is when:

- Someone hits you (slapping, kicking, pinching, and hitting)
- Someone touching your private parts
- Someone bullying you
- Bad touch gives you the feeling of sadness, fright, ashamed, embarrassed, and anger

TIPS FOR STUDYING FOR EXAMINATION

When it comes to exam preparation, there is good news and not so good news. The 'not so good' news is that exams are approaching, and many students are beginning to feel anxious. The good news is that exams are approaching and, therefore, the stress of pending examinations will be over soon. If we were to add a third category called the 'best' news, it would be that even though exams are approaching, you still have enough time to prepare.

Have you ever felt like you are trying extremely hard, but you are not learning as much as you think you should? If that happens to you, it may be that you need to change your study style for effective revision.

Below are some tips you can try. My advice to you would be to try several of them until you find a few techniques that work for you.

1. Get into a study routine – the easiest way to do this is through a time management plan. This helps you train your mind and body to study at fixed times every day.
2. Have a designated space in your home to study. This space should be clean and free from distractions, such as your phone, tablet, television, loud noises, or other people.
3. Study in small chunks and take frequent breaks – a recommended time frame is 45-minute periods with breaks in between. If this feels like too much, you can try 30-minute periods.
4. Highlight useful information.
5. You can record yourself reading your notes and listen to those recordings while doing chores or other activities.
6. Doing activities (such as walking) while trying to learn can help some types of learners.
7. Having a study group or study partner can be helpful. An effective study group will constitute members who keep each other motivated and use their strengths to support each other's weaknesses.
8. Use pictures and diagrams to understand information or processes.
9. Use flashcards.
10. Go through as many practice tests and past papers as you can!
11. Rewrite and summarize information in your own words.
12. Try teaching the work to someone else. It is a good idea to try teaching the work to someone in a lower class because it means that you will have to simplify the content.
13. When attempting to remember important information, read it, then look away or cover the material, and test yourself on how much you can recall.
14. Don't focus on one subject for too long. Instead, try switching between subjects to keep your mind optimally engaged.
15. Figure out your learning style and use techniques that maximize your dominant learning style. You can communicate with your Guidance Officer/Counsellor to help you do this.
16. Use anxiety management techniques to help you manage ahead of examinations.

I hope you practice some of these to help you on your examination journey.
If you need additional support, you can always contact your Guidance Officer/Counsellor!

Good Luck!



ANXIETY MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR EXAMS: SEA, CSEC, & CAPE

Exams are approaching and the pressure is building. It is normal to feel anxious about important examinations or events—in fact, even your parents, teachers, and Guidance Officers/Counsellors feel it. Interestingly, anxiety can have benefits; it can propel us to prepare and study more.

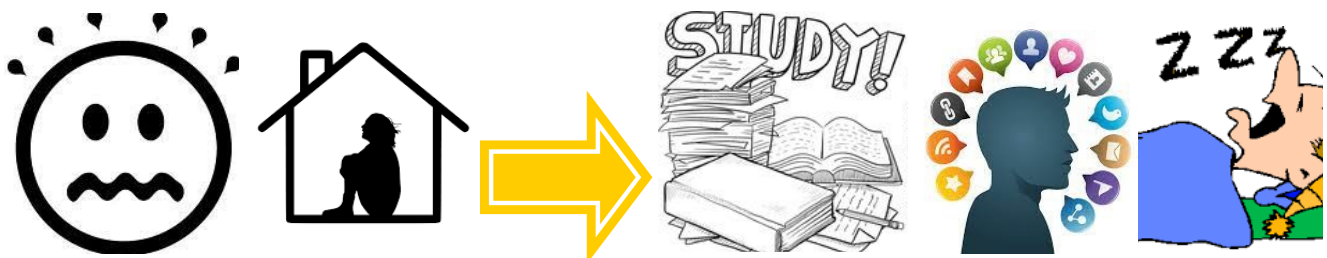
However, it must also be managed so that it does not affect our performance in major exams.

Tips for managing exam anxiety:

- Prepare. If you feel like you have not been preparing properly before, release that thought and tell yourself that you can start preparing right now, today. We cannot change the past, but we can control our actions from this point forward.
- Manage your social media consumption – sometimes other people’s posts increase our anxiety.
- Read, view or listen to motivational material. However, be mindful not to spend too much of your day doing this because studying should remain your primary focus.
- Find people, books or videos that make you laugh. Laughter is one of the most powerful forms of anxiety management.

- Everyone wants to do well in tests because these tests help in the next step in life. Therefore, aim to do your best in them. At the same time, remind yourself often that the results of these tests do not define who you are as a human being. Keep working hard at them but do not reduce your self-worth to a test result.
- Practice deep breathing: breathe in slowly, hold your breath for about 3-5 seconds, then release your breath slowly. Repeat this about 3-5 times.
- Go to a ‘happy place’ in your mind. This is a technique where you imagine yourself in a place that makes you feel completely happy or at peace. Hold on to the mental image for about 20-30 seconds.

- Replace anxious thoughts with positive ones. For example, if you notice yourself constantly thinking, “What if I fail”, say instead, “What if I pass”.
- Eat healthy foods so that your body is primed to receive and process information. Unhealthy foods often have us either fatigued or “too hyper”, while insufficient food leaves us unenergetic. On the morning of exams, be certain to have a good meal from a familiar place. The morning of a major exam is not a good time to try new foods or new food places.
- Get enough sleep the night before your exam.
- Pray. Prayer is a powerful way to release that last bit of anxiety. It is like you are saying to the higher power you believe in that you have done everything you can, and now you leave the rest up to Him/Her.



Good Luck, You've Got This!

Special Education in the General Education Classroom

Special Education in the general education classroom has been in the limelight for over twenty plus years and counting; however, the challenges of the students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in a general education classroom often exceed the benefits. Some difficult experiences are common to all categories of Special Education Need but there are challenges unique to certain categories.

Challenges experienced by students with SEN (diagnosed or suspected):

- Negative perception of the Special Education Need diagnosis
- Golem effect: lower expectations of SEN learners lead to poorer academic and behavioural performance
- Incorrect seating / inadequate seating: usually to the back or in a corner; desk too small for student
- Copious amounts of work to copy into books within a limited time frame
- Insufficient time spent on concepts and scarce opportunities for reinforcement of concepts
- Exclusion from extracurricular activities due to unnecessary and/or unfair punishments
- Exclusion from class discussions due to delayed responses or the need for a varied approach
- Operating under a continuous cloud of fear, low self-esteem and low self-confidence due to daily embarrassment, ridicule and shame. SEN students are usually used as examples to explain shortcomings in the classroom.
- Comparatively less praise, encouragement, and reward
- Limited individual attention and guidance
- Repeating of class levels with no solid validation
- Repeating class levels but the area of need is not addressed, therefore, compounding the ridicule, isolation, and low self-worth
- Little evidence of use of best practices by teachers, whereby the SEN student would benefit
- Misunderstanding of the role of student aides, and lack of policy, implementation, and follow-up with regard to their roles

Challenges for students with Physical Disabilities

- The school's infrastructure is inadequate to accommodate wheelchairs, walkers etc.
- Classrooms, tables, desks, bathroom facilities are unsuitable in their design
- School personnel have not received efficient training to support students with these needs
- Inadequate training for assigned personnel to support students with special needs
- Students, such as those with cerebral palsy, must adjust their toilet routines and daily diet as the accommodation of free bathroom use may not be afforded to them. This may be due to lack of personnel, toilet infrastructure, and equipment to aid such students with their toilet routine
- The distance or location of toilets

Challenges for students with Hearing -Impairments (in addition to the above)

- Limited understanding of deaf and hearing impairment, deaf culture, and deaf socialization
- Inadequate and inefficient investigation of the hearing loss and suitable placement of personnel to work with deaf and hearing-impaired students (teachers of the deaf)
- Misconception of the role of and limitations of an interpreter for such students
- Misconceptions of the role and failure to assign teachers to deaf and hearing-impaired students within the general education system

Challenges for students with Vision Impairment (in addition to the above)

- Inconsistent provision of large print and/or braille textbooks
- Limited awareness of devices for the vision-impaired students
- Exclusion from particular activities and subjects due to misinformation on skills and abilities of the vision impaired

See Issue 2 of the SSSD Insider for strategies aimed at assisting students with SEN in the classroom!

The Inclusive Education Policy: Did you Know?

What does the Inclusive Education Policy strive to do?

In 2009, the Ministry of Education received approval from Cabinet to develop the Inclusive Education (IE) Policy. The policy states that the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to a seamless education system of which inclusive education is a major component. It indicates that it shall provide support and services to all learners, by taking appropriate steps to make education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable.

According to the IE policy, the education system will actively seek out children who are not enrolled in schools and will aim to be responsive to the varying circumstances and needs of all learners.




Who does the Inclusive Education Policy apply to?

The IE policy applies to all learners:

- Nationals and non-nationals (immigrant workers)
- Students (including those with diverse learning needs, gifted learners)
- Those not attending school ('street' children, deprived of freedom, hospitalized, home-schooled)
- Children who come from remote or impoverished areas
- Those children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities

It also applies to all educational organizations (government, government-assisted, private, special school) offering early childhood, primary, and secondary education. The policy applies to parents, guardians and other caregivers. It is applicable to all school administrators, school supervisors, teaching and non-teaching personnel, as well as to all Divisions, Units and Departments within the Ministry of Education.



Why do we need an Inclusive Education Policy?

The IE policy is built on inclusive practices and is designed to underscore some key principles, such as equal opportunity, diversity appreciation, equitable access, recognition of human rights, maximum participation, focus on individual needs, school reform, continuous professional development, collaborative partnerships, equitable resourcing, positive discrimination, and quality assurance.

In the end, however, the Inclusive Education policy should be used to guide the process, which will help us all develop a new personal philosophy for educating all learners.



For any questions regarding the Inclusive Education policy, kindly contact the

Inclusive Education Specialist via

InclusiveEducationSpecialist@moe.gov.tt or 622-2181 Ext. 1053

Two Testimonials from Parents: Psychoeducational Assessment Experience

My child's teacher recommended my son have an assessment. He was really struggling with his schoolwork and getting low grades. I really didn't know anything else about it. First, there was an interview by the psychologist.

She asked a lot of personal questions. I had to go back in my memory of how things were when he was a baby and in preschool. I kept answering because she explained this would help her understand my child. The testing of my child was broken up into two sessions, which I felt was good, so he didn't get too tired or frustrated. He said he did ok, but there were some things he couldn't do.

Finally, we were called in to get the results. I was really relieved when the psychologist began to explain what she found. She explained everything in the report very carefully. She pointed out not only his weaknesses but also his strengths. I always knew that he was trying hard but still having so much trouble in school. It's not his fault. He has a disability. I am now able to explain to others to stop harassing him.

The psychologist also told me things I can do at home to help him. Overall, it was a great experience. I think my son will really benefit and I am going to start trying the things the psychologist told me to do at home.

I had heard about a psychoeducational assessment before I came to Student Support Services, but I never really knew what it involved. My son had difficulty with school. He seemed to forget everything he learned and was getting low grades all the time. One of his teachers suggested he be referred for help. When I met the psychologist, she tried to explain what it was about and how it could help him. She asked a lot of questions and did a lot of activities with my son.

When she gave me the report, she tried to explain what it all meant; I didn't fully understand it all. I was really disappointed something was wrong with my son. I felt guilty that somehow it was my fault that he was this way. The psychologist explained it wasn't and that a diagnosis means now we know how to help him find what he is good at. I left with some things to try at home and will wait for the help from special education. I hope my son can get through.

Interested in getting a psychoeducational assessment completed? If yes, the student will need to be referred to SSSD. This can be done by the school, parent, self-referral, or externally.

See Issue 2 of the SSSD Insider for more information on the Psychoeducational Assessment Process and Referral Process.



Mrs. Cheryl-Ann Grant



The Birthing of a Seed

While interacting with her cousin who is deaf, Mrs. Grant became aware of his tremendous untapped potential, which was restricted by his challenge to communicate. This awareness started a journey that would influence her future study and career choices. Initially, she volunteered three days a week at the Cascade School for the Deaf; she thoroughly enjoyed it. Mrs. Grant instantly bonded with the students as she immersed herself in the deaf community, learning their language and, sometimes, their secret codes. This experience was interrupted by her employment as a Temporary Clerk 1. Though happy to be employed, parting with the students was bittersweet. She longed to return to the school; so, joy and excitement filled her heart when she was contacted about a vacancy as an Assistant Teacher II in 1988. Over the next eleven years at the School for the Deaf, she completed a Diploma in Education at Valsayn Teachers' Training College and was appointed Teacher I. Furthering her interests in Special Education, she also completed an Advanced Diploma in Special Education and a Master of Education with the University of Sheffield and was promoted to Special Education Teacher II in 1995.

Spreading the Branches

Through the Special Education Unit, Ministry of Education, Mrs. Grant was called out of the classroom on a part-time assignment as an itinerant teacher to address the special needs of students in mainstream primary schools. Here she was able to widen her reach to students with a more diverse range of needs and became even more aware of the extent of these needs. Subsequently, she was given a full-time assignment in the Ministry's pilot Diagnostic Prescriptive Service, which harnessed the expertise of guidance and special education personnel to deliver services in the primary school system. In 1999 she was assigned to the Caroni Education District until the launch of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) in 2004, when she was hired on contract as a Diagnostic Specialist. Mrs. Grant and her colleagues entered the Division with great hope that the much-needed resources were being invested in students who required it. In this position, she led a team of special education teachers assigned to St. George East, until 2007, training and equipping them and managing the delivery of special education services to referred students at primary schools in the district. Pioneering the delivery of a service being offered to the mainstream primary school system also involved years of sensitization, collaboration, and awareness of key stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, principals, and school supervisors.

Transition to SSSD Head Office

In 2008, Mrs. Grant became the first officer to occupy the post of Inclusive Education Specialist at the Head Office of SSSD. In this position, she worked closely with all the Diagnostic Specialists as well as the various arms of the division. In 2014, she was hired on contract as the Coordinator, Diagnostic Prescriptive Services and Special Education. From this vantage point, she managed the delivery of services across all education districts. She had oversight of approximately 150 contract and substantive officers hired to deliver diagnostic prescriptive and special education services - this number was soon outstripped by the demand. Her duties included the chairing of the Concessions Committee: she managed the granting of special concessions to eligible students writing local examinations. She managed the provision of funding for eligible students enrolled at registered private special schools, securing an education for students requiring specialized support but unable to access it due to economic challenges. At the head office, she worked as a member of the Division's administrative team, under the leadership of Mr. Steve Williams. Mrs. Grant collaborated with the different departments in the Ministry, continued to advocate for the often-marginalized students, influenced policy, and served as a representative on special education matters. At the end of her contract, Mrs. Grant reverted to her substantive post at the Cascade School for the Deaf, where she is currently acting as the Senior Special Education Teacher.

The Ministry of Education, and its Students Support Services Division, wishes Mrs. Grant continued success and joy in all her future endeavours. Thank you!