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MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING & ROUTINES IN THE EARLY YEARS

Speakers: **Ann Douglas**, *Author Happy Parents, Happy Kids and Parenting Through the Storm*
Afroze Anjum, *Psychologist, TDSB*

Moderator: **Heather Johnson**, *Social Work, TDSB*

Monday, June 22, 2020 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Michelle: Good evening everyone, welcome, we're just going to give it a few more minutes. And we will be started shortly. Margaret I think we're ready to go now. Thank you.

Margaret: Next slide Latha.

My name is Margaret Horvath and I will be your technical assistant. This session is being recorded and will be available on the TDSB website at www.tdsb.on.ca/conversations. We have enabled only the Q&A function. You have been muted and you are able to share your screen. You are unable to share your screen, sorry. Everything in Zoom is customizable based on your individual settings. So, your display may not be exactly as I described, however, what shall be similar is the black tool bar at the bottom of your screen. It should appear when you move your cursor. If you want to open the Q&A simply click on the Q&A icon. Everyone will have access to the Q&A so please, ask your questions there. If you are calling into the session please use star 9, the raise hand function and the moderator will try to get to your question. Next step is audio and microphone. The audio quality of this session is based on your individual bandwidth. If you're worried about slow internet connections, you can call in by using the dial in information included in the invite. The invite is also located at www.tdsb.on.ca under heading latest news. If your speakers' bandwidth becomes unstable and things become choppy, please bear with us we will hear it too and will work as quickly as possible to resolve the issue. You may exit or change full screen speaker or gallery view on the drop down menu. Lastly, there will be a quick survey for you to complete before you leave the webinar. I've put it into a chat. To get things started I'm going to hand it over to Cecile Farnum for the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee.

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Cecile: I'm Cecile in ward 9 and a member of PIAC. For those who don't know, PIAC advises the Board on parent engagement and provides advice about the education system to parents and school councils. I'm pleased to welcome you to tonight's webinar, Mental Health Well-Being and Routines in the Early Years, which is the first in the series. I would like to read the land acknowledgment, "We acknowledge we are hosted on the lands of the Mississaugas of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Wendat. We also recognize the enduring presence of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples."

I will turn it over to Colleen Russell-Rawlins.

Colleen: Thank you very much Cecile. Good evening everyone. We are very pleased that you are able to join us this evening for our first of three conversations this week. This evening's panel will discuss Mental Health Well-Being and Routines in the Early Years. Our thought exchange survey to families really highlighted the importance of mental health and well-being in creating positive family routines as we transition between different learning environments. Please note that on June 24th we will be hosting the second session on Mental Health and Well-Being in Adolescents and Teens and on June 26th the subject will be, Talking Race with Families. So thank you for joining us and we hope that you and your family will benefit from the insights of our amazing panel this evening. Let me introduce Rachel Chernos Lin, Trustee for Ward 11 and a member of PIAC, a Trustee Member of PIAC. Thank you and welcome Rachel.

Rachel: Thank you Associate Director, Russell Rawlins. Good evening as the Associate Director mentioned, I'm the Trustee for Ward 11 and I'm also the Trustee representative for the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee here at the TDSB. I am pleased to introduce the first of three webinars we will be hosting this week. All of the topics of this week's webinars have been chosen based on direct feedback from parents and guardians and tonight's topic mental health wellness in the pandemic and physical distancing requirements have changed our children's lives dramatically. So many parents have raised the impact of all these changes on their children's mental health and well-being. With regular routine, early years is certainly one many parents have been talking about. The COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing requirements have changed our children's lives dramatically. So many parents have raised the impact of all these changes on their children's mental health and well-being. With regular routines no longer set by the morning school bell, parents have been challenged with figuring out how to establish routines and set their children up for success in this new environment. As a school board, it is important we listen to our communities. It helps us make informed decisions and it helps us to provide support and guidance where needed. And so tonight, we look to an engaging evening where we hope to address the parent concerns related to mental health well-being and routines. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce this evening's moderator Heather Johnson, a social worker and mental health lead. Heather is part of a Provincial team called School Mental Health Assist and is also involved in developing implementing and supporting the TDSB children and youth mental health and well-being strategy. Amidst all of these projects, Heather manages to find time to support parents through events such as forums and

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parent council meetings. I was lucky enough to have her speak at one of mine last fall where her passion for creating welcoming spaces and inclusive schools which for the well-being of all students was made abundantly clear. We are so fortunate to have her here this evening to moderate what will be without a doubt, an informative and helpful evening from a terrific panel of experts. Over to you Heather.

Heather: Thank you so much Rachel. I really appreciate that. It's really kind of exciting for us to be here tonight doing something very different than what we've done before. I'm excited to be part of this conversation about mental health and well-being and the importance of structure, consistency and routines in the early years and beyond. As you were saying, over the past few months, COVID has created many challenges for us particularly as parents juggle working and family obligations while trying to navigate remote learning for their children. It's not anything that anyone could have really prepared us for. It's affected how we are feeling and doing in our well-being. I actually have been calling it the COVID coaster, as it brings many emotional highs and lows sometimes we don't realize the impact of the ongoing stress that we are all experiencing because it shows itself differently in everyone. We are hoping that this evening, you will leave with a new thought or idea that makes you think on things differently or invite you to try something new. And, we've had lots of opportunities in the last few months to try something new but hopefully we can again tonight look for something that we can use as we move ahead.

Throughout the evening, as Margaret said, you can post your questions in the question box. You'll see in the screen and you'll have an opportunity at the end of the meeting to address as many questions as possible. We hope that you enjoy the evening. So tonight, we're offering you three very experienced speakers who bring with them a wealth of knowledge and life experiences. They will share with us some of their ideas which will hopefully be helpful to you as parents as you figure out how to move forward. During the evening, we will have a short break between the second and the third speaker so between Afroze and Karen; it will give us a chance to move around, maybe grab a beverage of your choice. As your children probably remind you, it is hard sitting still and focussing for a long time. And I think as adults, we need to recognize that so it's important we give ourselves a break. So, I'm very pleased tonight that I would like to first welcome Ann Douglas, who is the author of a number of parenting books. Ann has deep experiential knowledge as a role of a mother of four. Ann is going to start us off by having us think how we might prepare for a summer, a summer like we have never experienced before. Thanks Ann and welcome.

Ann you are muted.

Ann: Sorry about that I don't usually mute myself because I forget to unmute myself there we go I think I am now audible which is great. I wanted to say how much I appreciate everybody who managed to get in front of the screen tonight because I know it isn't easy and it shows how committed you are to trying to figure out strategies for navigating what Heather just described as truly a one of a kind summer. We've never had a summer like this before and so a lot of the supports that we could rely on in normal times

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simply aren't available. I wanted to start out briefly by acknowledging how deeply challenging the past few months have been for people. Often I'll be talking to a parent and I've hosted a number of town halls in recent months and people feel like it's just them or they are doing it wrong. It's not that you're doing it wrong, it's the challenge is extraordinary. So, I mean just looking at the layers of it, the fact that so many people had to change their working lives overnight, the fact that they had to do that in the context of also you know, supporting remote learning and not having access to child care. All of these different layers of expectations that have been placed on the shoulders of parents have been crushing for a lot of people. I hope you're sitting back in the most comfortable chair you have in your home and taking a deep breath and enjoying a cup of tea. It's not just you; it's so many parents right now. If there's one two word phrase you can use to describe the nature of the challenge of this moment, and maybe a concept that will help you understand why you have been feeling so overloaded and overwhelmed, it's called, 'role conflict' and 'role conflict' happens when one of your roles in life collides with another role in your life and that feels like it's happening 24/7. It's not surprising people are feeling overwhelmed and overloaded and also there's a lot of global research on parental happiness and stress that speaks to the role of 'role conflict' and when parents feel like they don't have that separation of roles or that they are constantly letting somebody down in their life. It really is a source of great parental stress and unhappiness but we're not here to just talk about why this is so hard because that would be discouraging. I think a lot of people know it's hard. I want to pivot to solutions and I'm going to present four different buckets of solutions. We're going to talk first of all about calming yourself then as the presentation goes on a little later on I'm going to talk about calming your child, then I'm going to talk about parenting in a way you can feel good about both in this moment and for many years and decades to come and then I'm going to pivot and keep it real because the last thing I want is anybody who tuned in tonight to hang up later on feeling even more guilty than they did when they logged on that is not the purpose of this presentation at all. So let's dive into strategies during this brief time I have with you tonight and of course I'll be helping to answer questions later on. So, if you think of something, type it into the Q&A box right away so you don't lose that question or thought.

Strategies for Calming Yourself

I think we need to remind ourselves that calm is our parenting super power. When we're able to get to that state of calm, we're able to do our best thinking. We're able to come up with much more creative solutions than might normally pop into our head and able to parent in a more conscious and deliberate way. It really improves the quality of our thinking and parenting when we get to that place where we're able to dial back some of the cognitive load. I was fascinated to learn a couple of years ago, when you're feeling really anxious your brain is multitasking, it's switching channels from whatever it is you're trying to focus on to feeling anxious about something else. And, you can see repeated that jump how many thousands of times a day and you can see the cognitive load that triggers. I also want to emphasize the fact that we have the opportunity as the grownups to set the emotional tone in our families because we've had decades of

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our life to learn a lot of these self-regulation strategies, how to manage our thoughts, feelings and actions in ways that work for us and not against us. And sometimes, I know you look at your little ones and you think, they are so grown-up or look at your teenager and they are taller than you and we expect them to act like mini adults and they are not yet so this is why we have such a central role to play in the calming. Now, I know there's at least one other person like me who is not naturally wired to be calm so I want to tell you my little secret escape hatch I give myself. I tell myself I might not be able to get to a state of calm but maybe I can endeavour to be a little calmer a little more often because there's never going to be a day in my life when I wake up and I'm actually calm and I stay in that place just not going to happen so I'm trying to make this more realistic for me and maybe for you as well. And also in terms of calming ourselves, we need to accept the fact that things are going to be uncertain for a while. There are not any clear answers to the things that we want answers to because public health authorities and other policy makers are figuring this out in real time, so, we just don't know. I love having a routine and a schedule and a road map and a lot of those things just aren't available to us right now, it's very improvisational. We have to accept our emotions as opposed to trying to run from our emotions and I know that's something at least one of the other speakers will be talking about later on, about emotional resilience and so on. I would encourage you, in terms of calming yourself, to take stock of all the coping skills and strategies you figured out along the way. You've no doubt had curve balls and life challenges and think about what you can take from those earlier experiences to apply to the situation that is right now. And, instead of feeling like you're focussing on all the things that are not within your control right now, maybe do a pivot and try to focus on all the things that still are within your control. For example, how you choose to focus your intention and we can focus our attention in ways that make our lives happier or that magnify the challenge of the moment. That's a little bit about calming yourself.

Now, let's talk about Calming your Child

What I'm talking about here of course is the magic of coregulation and coregulation basically means leaning on another person so that you can have help regulating your emotions. Now, obviously this is something that we do with babies from a very young age that's why we hold them in our arms and sway back and forth gently and we say soothing things to them. It's because we want them to experience that state of calm so over time they can learn how to get to that place of calm on their own. So that is a powerful tool in your kit but it requires you to get to that place of calm or calmer in order to be able to provide that to your child. It can be helpful to help children to understand it's a good idea to reach out to other people for support. As humans, we are wired for connection and that leaning on other people is an amazing strategy for sharing the load in a really emotionally challenging time. We can also encourage our kids to talk about whatever it is they are thinking and feeling and look for opportunities to validate those feelings. Our kids really need to know there's no such thing as a bad feeling or anything that they should feel guilty about so if you have a child who is feeling deeply disappointed and grumpy

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because their birthday party plans didn't go the way they would have liked, that child might also be feeling guilty if everybody is worried about a relative's health and might think how can I be so selfish to be worried about my birthday party when really you can be feeling sad about the loss of your birthday party and worried about your grandparents health at the same time. You don't have to choose one or the other. We can remind ourselves not to be triggered by what can sometimes feels like a child's super annoying behaviour. It's not that they are trying to be annoying, what is happening is they are experiencing stress behaviour so the way you manage that so you don't get super frustrated is to say to yourself, "What is my child trying to tell me with their behavior and how can I meet the underlying need", because that cuts through all those feelings of frustration that you might very well be feeling. I also just wanted to quickly touch upon a thread that is in the entire presentation but I think it's important to remind ourselves, we human beings love our ruts and routines so, I would encourage you to look for ways to maybe not have it feel like a rigid timetable or schedule that's too structured but to think about having a reassuring rhythm to the days so your kids know meal times are roughly in this time frame and we go to and wake up in these rough time frames. It just gives you kind of that nice reassuring rhythm to the day.

Let's talk briefly about Parenting in a Way you can Feel Good about both today and for many years to come.

I find it really helpful when I'm dealing with a challenging situation with one of my four kids, to say to myself, what are my long-term big picture goals here? What are my hopes and dreams for myself, my child and my family over the longer term? That's why we have the Longview on this slide. You're looking ahead to the future and thinking, if I want to be really connected to my child, a year or a decade from now, let's work backwards from that point and think about the kind of things that will build upon the bond between you and your child. Thinking about that can help you to make more conscious and deliberate parenting choices as opposed to parenting on auto pilot and also I think we want to ask ourselves what kind of memories do we want our children to take with them from this moment because have no doubt, this will be a formative experience in the life of your child and family. 20 years from now when you're getting together at a family reunion, what do you want them to share when they talk about what it was like to live through this time. Maybe there will be moments of frustration because every family has had moments of frustration but maybe there will be hilarious stories of fun and joyous moments together, maybe you are a TikTok family that made dance videos. If so, I am in your awe. You can learn a little bit about child development so you can parent in a way that is developmentally appropriate for your child. Nothing is more frustrating for you as the parent or for your child if you are holding them to like the ruler of what it's like to be a five-year-old when they are still a three and a half -years-old or likewise you're expecting that teenager to act like an adult that's simply not developmentally possible when they are still learning things along the way. We can remind ourselves that good parenting basically amounts to three simple yet powerful things. Giving children a message of unconditional love and approval letting them know there's nothing they could do that would ever jeopardize your love for them,

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they are worthy of your love just by virtue of being themselves.

Second point is, warm sensitive and responsive parenting where you're really tuned into the needs of that child in that moment. Now, before you lay a guilt trip on yourself, no parent on the planet can do this 24 hours a day because if we were always that tuned into our kids, nobody would ever eat dinner, and nobody could do laundry. Our lives would be completely absorbed by parenting and it would be exhausting. So, in perspective with that point, support for their emerging abilities. Knowing what your child is capable of and gently negotiating them along the path to greater autonomy but not expecting giant leaps and bounds and recognizing there will be some back steps.

Finally in this section I want to emphasize the importance of Celebrating and Recognizing your Many Strengths as a Parent.

So often we pivot to seeing all the things we're doing, wrong. I would encourage you to think what would a friend say about you if they were bragging what a great parent you are to me? What words would they use to describe you? Really let those words sit with you and consider how they might be a resource to you during this time. So finally, I'm going to pivot to the last bucket of strategies which is all about thinking progress not perfection. I think it's so important now more than ever to give yourself permission to be a gloriously imperfect parent and your child to be a gloriously imperfect kid. You're going to make mistakes and say and do things you regret and this is an amazing opportunity to teach your child about the art of relationship repair. Recognizing when a relationship has gotten off track and having strategies for bringing things back on track because parents don't have to be perfect and neither do kids. It's okay to apologize to your kids when you've made a mistake and we can model that behaviour for our kids. It's such an important life lesson. A couple of other quick tips before I pass the baton to the next presenter. I want you to minimize the expectation gap, to recognize maybe in normal times, yours for yourself could be this high but these aren't normal times so bring them down to reflect the resources that are available to you have already really significantly decreased. Practice self-compassion which basically just means treating yourself with at least as much kindness as to another person struggling. The words that have helped me so often in my life, 'I'm doing the best that I can in a really difficult situation'. Let those words sink in and finally look for ways to safe guard the resource. Think, what's realistic and possible with regards to self-care and look for opportunities to build on that, over time. So one more slide I think just it takes a village slide. I want you to recognize that you don't have to handle this on your own. We were never meant to parent on our own and if it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to support that child's parent. We need support at every stage of parenting and also have to recognize what the village has to gain by offering support to parents and kids. We have the opportunity as the community to raise up the happiest and healthiest generation of kids ever. So here is a call to just simply be the village for one another. Thank you.

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Heather: Thank you so much, Ann. Can you hear me? Great. So, thank you so much. There was some really lovely things that ran through my mind as you spoke and I really loved the comment I'm to remind us all that we're doing the best we can at this time and I think it's such an important message as a parent to think about that. We're dealing in times we never ever imagined we would be. So hopefully we can keep some of those things in mind as we move on and the importance of the love, the unconditional warm sensitive responsiveness we give to our children and I love the third one, support for the emerging abilities. I've seen as we've progressed through COVID, that there's lots of opportunities for those small silver linings maybe there was an opportunity for independence in a child maybe you wouldn't have experienced before. We're going to move on, thank you Ann. I'm going to welcome Afroze Anjum, who is our next speaker and Afroze is a psychologist with the TDSB and she has studied and worked in the area of resilience for about the last 15 years and she's going to offer some ideas how we can support our children's resilience and our own resilience at a time when we're really being tested. Our resilience is really being tested by the pandemic and other global crises such as the anti-black racism. So, welcome Afroze and we're excited to hear what you have to tell us about resilience.

Afroze: Thank you Heather for an amazing introduction and thank you Ann for the wonderful ideas that you shared with us during this presentation. I am going to remember to stay kind to myself. That is one strategy that we all need to work on. So, in this presentation, I am just going to focus briefly on parenting, I am going to invite you to do one or two activities along with reflections and you can continue to work on those activities later on and then I will finish this talk with a few reminders. And of course, I will be available to answer your questions at the end of the evening. Okay, next.

So, if I might request you to sit in a relaxed posture, take a few deep breaths and think of something that you are grateful for that happened today or yesterday. So, I call gratitude a healing bomb. It's that gift that has this power to make us calm in the moment when we might be feeling stress. And, we all have amazing things to be grateful for all the time. Something I'm grateful for is yesterday. I had an opportunity to have a lovely Father's Day and revisit some of the videos I had made with my father as he is no longer with us. I am really thankful I have at least those rich memories. Next.

So when I think of resilient parenting this image of the bird actually strikes my mind. This is an eagle bird and the eagle bird is strongly known for its strong parental instinct and its ability to protect its young ones. Yet, this bird trains its children when it feels it's ready so when all the other birds are in their nest when the storm comes this bird trains its children how to fly in the face of the storm. So, in a nutshell, to me resilient parenting is really about loving our children deeply in a way that we actually prepare them how to manage the storms and the challenges that life is inevitably going to bring to them. One of the phenomenons that we all human beings actually really struggle with even under normal circumstances like a year ago when we didn't have pandemic is negativity bias which is our ability to pay more attention

and more focus and time to negative information and negative feedback. And that really is a symptom of our survival instinct actually. So, given the context of a pandemic, you can multiply that negativity bias by 5. So, no wonder we are seeing an increase in mental health challenges, an increase in anxiety, and that's taking a toll on our relationships actually and sometimes with people with whom they spend a lot of time because we are all forced to be pressurized to live at home and share the space with family members. So research has shown that if you want to manage the effect of negativity bias, so say for instance if you've made one negative comment, you need to balance, we need to balance it out with five positive comments for the health of a relationship. And by five positive comments of positive experiences, I don't mean to say that they have to be big things. They could be simple micro moments of joy. Maybe a smile, a hug, or just a positive comment. So the question is, how do we bring more positive emotions during the time when we are all stressed and we all struggle with negativity bias? Next please.

Ann touched upon this beautifully, this is the time when as parents it's not only important to make our children feel physically safe but also emotionally safe. Because that is by bonding with them and forming connections with them. By forming those bonds, that bonding and connections with them, we are giving them happy memories. So that when all of this is over and when our kids would start going back to school, they will have these happy memories that will give them that energy that will be needed to handle the risks that school life is going to bring to them. So try to enter your children's world, talk to them, what are they thinking or feeling. Say for instance your child has shown you a drawing and the drawing has a house on it. Start with, there's the house. Who lives in that house? How are the characters feeling? Share your stories. So research has shown that resilient family members share their stories with each other and those stories are not only of success but they are of hardship as well as failures. This way you prepare your children, we prepare our children how to have a realistic taste of life which is going to bring challenges as well as success. Try to model use of emotions and feelings in our everyday language. When we as parents use emotions like oh, I am feeling tired, overwhelmed, excited, nervous, we actually quip our children's world and we give them permission to use those emotions in their language and hence our conversation with them deepens and gets more rich.

Another way to have more positive emotions is praise our children and it's important that when we praise our children we don't praise the outcome or we don't praise them, 'Hey Johnny you're so smart you're so good at it'. It's important that we praise the process of it. 'Johnny, I love how you've paid attention to the details or how you've persisted despite the challenges with this math problem'. Play with them. Play leads to micro moments of joy. And, it's a natural way to develop some of those social emotional skills. Just pick up a ball and play and see the magic of play. Read with them. That's a natural opportunity for them to develop an interest in reading as well as embed some of the ideas that you want to develop in them. Next please.

Ann talked about it, that at this point our children's world has been turned upside-down. Their school has been taken away from them. They were looking forward to the summer camps and many of them have

been cancelled. So, through the dialogue we can try to bring the attention of our children to some of the things that are beyond their control. Because when we focus on things that are beyond our control, our anxiety can really become dysfunctional. So, while we don't have control over what the school reopening is going to look like, how long this Corona is going to last, we may not have control over how others are going to behave or feel, we may go out for a walk and some people may not be wearing a mask or maybe they come too close to us. We don't have control on what comes to the news. We have control over a number of things such as we can choose what we are going to eat, what is our bedtime like, taking care of our sleep, who do I spend my time with and what's the quality of it and who do I spend my time with. During the summer, instead of feeling disappointed that there are no summer camps, we can come up with creative ways of learning new skills, maybe learning to bike, maybe taking an origami or arts class. So, if you could as parents and as parents and with our children if we could find our attention to the things we can control. Next, please.

One of the most effective ways actually to bring a sense of control while our children's life is so uncertain is to bring some routine in their life. And this schedule really went viral. And your family can make your own schedule that suits everyone else's needs. So if you look at this schedule, in the middle there are some broad categories that the family members could come up with that how they want to spend the summer and in the last section there are some options there. So children can decide how they do want to spend their creative time, do they want to focus on arts or play with slime. Guess which one is on my family's schedule in the choice list? My two boys every day are responsible for emptying the dishwasher and putting the plates in the dishwasher. That's amazing for my well-being. So this schedule, this routine visual reminder gives them a sense of control as well as a sense of choice. And you can tweak it on a daily basis depending on the needs of your family members. Next please.

Another important way that we can manage, learn to manage as parents as well as thinking style of our children is by managing the explanatory style. And doctors have done a lot of research. It's not about the challenge, while we may not have a lot of control of what's the nature of the challenge is going to be that is going to hit us, we may have some sense of control over how are we are going to define that challenge. How are we going to make sense of it? And by that I mean, beliefs. And, how do we make sense of that challenge, can really impact how we feel? So to give you an example, one of the challenges that many parents including me have felt really is, managing our work as well as our home life and helping our children with their school and that can be overwhelming. So, as I am speaking with some of the parents I noticed that many parents who were feeling , who are feeling overwhelmed when I spoke with them deeper, some of the beliefs of the parents was I can't manage working from home, cannot do anything. So, the way they were explaining this challenge had lacked hope. So I wonder how can we make this belief a bit more optimistic? Heather do you have any ideas?

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Heather: I think one of the ideas might be to not have such high expectations to recognize that you're working at home in a pandemic, It's not that you're just working at home, but you're working at home in a very difficult time which then might lead you to think that you could have changed your expectations for yourself and for your children. And try to focus on the other ways that they learn as well not just traditional ways of learning but all the other things that they might be learning by being at home and spending more time with you.

Afroze: Exactly Heather. We can change our perspective of the challenge and change the narrative and hopefully that might bring our feelings, make our feelings more realistic and helpful. Next, please.

One of the golden ways actually of bringing more positive emotions into our life is use of character strength which are qualities that we exhibit through our behaviour, thinking and feelings that really impacts our own well-being as well as our children's well-being and all the people who are close to us. Next, please.

So if you could please be ready with a pen or pencil and a page to write on as we do a brief activity. Next, please.

If you could please sit in a comfortable position and as you continue to breathe, think about a time when you handled a challenge or problem regarding your child adequately. Perhaps what comes to your mind is a small event that brought forth your resilience, bravery and persistence. I'm going to show you images of 24 strengths. As you see these images, please pick the five strengths that strike your heart, yes, I use them often or I use that during that difficult time with my child. And please note it down. Next. Next. Next. Thank you Latha.

If you got a chance to note down some of your strengths, I will encourage you to reflect, give some time, a minute or so now around these questions and you can continue this reflection later on as we are struggling with limited time here. So some of the questions could be, how do these strengths reflect different aspects of your resilience, as a parent. Reflect on how can you use those strengths during the current time of uncertainty as a parent because these are the strengths that are going to help you during this difficult time and anchor you. Consider sharing the story with your child later and encourage them to think about their strengths. You can continue this reflection later on. Next.

A very important aspect of our well-being and the well-being of people close to us is, strength spotting. That is, we pick the strengths as exhibited by our children in the real time. Name that strength and appreciate them for those at that time. That really builds their confidence. Just like Ann in the beginning of this presentation appreciated all of us and she named a strength of bravery. And that made me feel a bit

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better that someone is naming our strength. One of the strengths of my youngest child is bravery and I mention it to him is that I really appreciate how you crack me up with your sense of humor during the times when I'm feeling stressed. Or someone can be appreciated for their strength of kindness. 'Wow, I'm amazed by your kindness, you are making chocolate Chip cookies for your friends. Or the teacher could say to the student, 'I know your persistence really is amazing. You've stuck with this math problem despite the fact it's so complex'. Last but not the least one of my suggestions to some of the families who come from racialized backgrounds we know that some families might be under that added stress given some of the challenges in that area, some of the sad incidents that have happened is parents can spot strengths from the racialized background and share stories of people who struggled with the racism, and did not give up. Next please.

Think of Maijala Yousafzai who was shot in her head for going to school. At the end of this dramatic incident she could have said, "I can't talk, I can't go to school, I'm scared". Instead, she used this traumatic incident and used the energy of it like an eagle and actually became louder in her choice. And, used her strength of bravery and social justice. No wonder she ended up winning the Nobel peace prize and she's a success today and graduating from University. She couldn't have done it without the help of her father.

In summary, our resilience as parents matter. If we are resilient we will be excellent role models for our children because our children do what we do, not what we talk. So we can try to walk the talk. Next, please.

And finally, some reminders, take a deep breath during stressful times especially, take this opportunity, take this time as an opportunity to bond and really connect with your children. And people who are dear to you. Remember our strengths and strengths of our children and spot those strengths and use them more and more. In this uncertain time, keep our focus on what is it that I can control and what is it that is beyond our control and then choose a specific action from what we can control and focus our energies on that. When the challenge hits us, we have a choice, we can explain that challenge as an optimist or a pessimist and last but not least, ask yourself, am I acting like the parent I want to be? Thank you for your loving presence here and I will be happy to answer your questions at the end of the evening.

Heather: Thank you Afroze, appreciate that. And take five. We're going to take a few minutes and we're going to play some music I want to thank Afroze again to help us reflect on it's such a trying time how important it is to be in touch with our resilience and what can we do to enhance that for ourselves and for our children. Lots of food for thought there. So, we are going to put on a little bit of music just so you can get up and stretch your legs, get another cup of tea or whatever it is so we can focus for our last little bit. If people want to take a break Latha is going to put something on for us that will brighten up things and we'll be back. When the music goes off we will come right back on again.

[Break]

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Heather: Welcome back everybody. Hope that gave everyone a minute or two to stretch their legs and take a little break. I think sometimes we forget sitting so long is not so great. So I'm going to keep us moving along just in the interest of time. And I'm very excited our third speaker and final speaker is Karen Thornton and Karen is a social worker and clinician who works through a framework. She worked the past 15 years with individuals from many races, religions and cultural groups. Her work is based on inclusion. She will help you to understand what mental health is and how important it is as parents we try to create a sense of stability and identity in our children and how that will help us deal with all the challenges we are faced with in our world right now. So I'm going to pass it over to you thank you so much for joining us.

Karen: Thank you so much Heather for introducing me. And I just want to kind of set the precedent for what's going to be talked about today because when we start talking about mental health, we have to talk about mental health in the context of some difficult things. Trauma, race, inequality, oppression, marginalization so I just wanted to before we start talking I just want to start, go back to Ann's when she kind of sent it out there that it takes a village to raise a child. I want us to be very aware that you know having these conversations we want to make sure that We know that it does take a village to raise a child and when we're talking about difficult conversations like these it's important to know you're not alone. I'll also like to point out what Afroze says when it says to be kind to ourselves. Throughout this presentation I want us to take an opportunity, take a moment to listen to our bodies. We'll be talking a lot about bodies, black bodies white bodies red bodies and brown bodies. When you hear these terms nothing else depending how they trigger you and we'll talk about that, I want you to tap into what you're feeling and you'll have an opportunity at the end to talk about these things openly and have a discussion as how to kind of navigate these conversations with your children, with yourself, and with your communities. So please, sit back and relax and let's take an opportunity to talk about some pressing issues and have an open discussion at the end around how these issues are affecting us at these challenging times.

Good evening everyone and thank you for the invitation to be a part of such an important forum. My aim is to further your knowledge and understanding around race, racism and mental health. In these unprecedented times, it seems like a sense of agency is being challenged. When I talk about agency, I'm technically talking about feeling of being in charge of your life. Around this time. we feel like we don't have a grasp, right of what's going on within the world today. Knowledge, knowing where we stand and knowing that you have a say in what happens to you in the world. There's been so much that's been changing rapidly in the last few months. Knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances and for many racialized and marginalized groups, agency seems to have been alluding them not just today but for generations. But with COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, there has been a resurgence around talking about oppression of racialized bodies and marginalized communities which makes a lot of people wonder if equality is possible at all under the current umbrella of the dominant culture. And as a

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collective, understanding or mental health as it associates to race, racism and oppression has become more important than ever before. So, what I would like to do is I'd like us to look at this slide. This is going to be the way I'm going to kind of outline talking about you know different aspects today. The first thing I'm going to talk about is mental health. How does race talk about is what is mental health. How does race, racism and race based talk about is, what is mental health? How does race, racism and race based affect mental health. What is whiteness and racialized bodies and how it's impacted in the world today. Common mental health concerns presenting themselves due to COVID-19, the protests around the world with difficulties that we face each and every single day? What impacts on mental health and what can we do to cope or minimize the impact of racism on mental health?

I'll start by talking about what is mental health. It seems to be a quick buzzword these days, take care of your mental health, but a lot of us don't really understand what is mental health. So, what I'm going to talk about is, we cannot talk about mental health without mentioning two important variables, genetics and early experiences. When we talk about genetics, we have to talk about who we are born into. Are we born into black communities, brown communities, indigenous communities, white communities, these descendants how do we take up the world and how is that world, how is that world basically, how is that world affected by how we take it up and what we talk about is it has a lot to do with our gene? Our gene contains instructions that tell our bodies how to work. The chemical composition of the environment, that's passed down from generation to generation can authorize or prevents instructions from being carried out. Based on how our genes have been changed or altered or manifested itself year after year, generation to generation, we may all take up the world differently because of our descent where we came from. That does not mean we are destined to respond a certain way because of our gene it does not mean that we will talk a little bit about that later on. What it does mean is that more racialized bodies respond differently to stress than trauma and different circumstances and authority than non-racialized bodies. And it's important to know because of that the way in which we take up the situation in the world today is very different by everyone who comes from different places in the world.

Now, the other thing I want to touch on is early experiences. Early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain. When we are developing as we are exposed to certain environments, be it an environment that's rich with poverty, an environment that's rich with overstimulation, an environment rich with love, an environment that's rich with certain injustices, what happens is the brain starts taking up that information and it starts kind of doing either it shuts down or it starts to kind of shift and get wired in a different way. Manifested itself and shoring up allergy with mental health issues or mental health concern or learning difficulties. When I was researching this talk, I came across a really great research on a study that was done on rats. It's always the rats I always say it's always the rats when we do research. And the research basically was the exposure of rats to cherry blossom and what they did with the rats was every morning they would expose the rats to cherry blossom scents. So they wanted to determine whether or not the rats that were born, pups that were born from these rats would experience these difficulties or they

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will experience some type of sensation if they had no exposure to these scents. What they realized was even though they took those pups and they moved them to adults that were never exposed to cherry blossom scents the rats, pups that were born to these rats that were exposed would respond in a different way when they smelled cherry blossom scent. What they recognize is that all regenerations of these pups that gave birth to other pups still is a different way of absorbing the information when they are exposed to cherry blossom scents. What I want to say is basically our gene and our environment is a significant reaction a significant play on how we take up the world that we live in today. Next slide, please.

Mental health is a state of being that affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health includes emotional or psychological and social well-being. It's how relate to stress. It's how we relate to others. It's how we make choices. So when we are working in these uncertain sometimes, it's really important to look at how have I dealt with stress in the past, how has my mom, dad, sister, brother, my family members my ancestors dealt with stress in the past because it might also be that you're not aware that you might be dealing with stress in the same way based on the fact that you have a predisposition to dealing with stress in a certain way. Now, when communities have experienced discrimination and oppression for generation, the body responds differently to stress. Stress can become toxic stress that managed itself no racialized trauma. Now you might ask what is racialized trauma, it's a form of race-based stress inflicted towards persons of colours and indigenous people by the dominant group in western culture. Racism can show up even when it's unintentional by white bodies because of their lived experiences. It's very different compared to black bodies, brown bodies, indigenous bodies which subsequently can lead racialized bodies to increased mental challenges because of the way in which they are taken in the information. With Black Lives Matter and the protest that's taking place and being quarantined with your children and feeling this sense of displacement it's very important to understand that it's not just because you don't know how to deal with stress or you don't know what to say to your kids about what's going on. It has a long history in the world. And since the beginning of colonial travels in Europe, and the Americas and the Caribbean, people have been racialized. It has seen as property to be owned, laboured to white settlers, explored or discovered where whiteness has been viewed as good, clean, pure, and desired. When whiteness is marketed as the ideal and anything different less than, the impact it has on racialized bodies is that unwanted, dark, dirty, violent and undesirable. When whiteness has been given the dominance over racialized or marginalized bodies, these continue to be. Next slide please,

They continue to be the enslavement of racialized bodies especially around police brutality, incarceration and poverty. Next slide, please.

There's been lots of studies conducted by the World Health Organization and literature written by prominent figures in mental health but that report that there is they have seen an increase in depression,

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they have seen an increase in PTSD, an increase in learning disabilities among racialized or marginalized communities. What we are witnessing today around Black Lives Matter is not just about George Floyd, it's about the emotional psychological and social well-being of people especially black people, by the hands of the dominant group. Even though it's conscious or unconscious, it's important for us to educate ourselves around the issues that face by marginalized and racialized groups. Now people ask me how do I become part of the solution? How do I deal with talking to my children in this difficult time about COVID, about Black Lives Matter, about race and justice? How do I do this? Because everything impacts our mental health. Generational trauma that's hidden inside of our genes of racialized people that face racism discrimination and oppression daily. I want to reiterate at this time that the interaction of gene and the experiences affect your mental health. So, how can we actually set up the solution? How can we set up certain you know coping strategies? Let's call it so we could minimize the impact on our bodies, on the bodies of racialized individuals. Next slide, please.

I always say to my clients that I work with is we into he had to find a sense of identity, owning who we are as individuals. What I mean by that is feeling of being in charge of your life, knowing that you stand for issues and knowing that you have a say in how your life unfolds. It's knowing that you have the ability to shape your life and you have ability as parents to talk into your children more than anyone else. Because as parents, you know the history, you know the areas where your children struggle, where the family has struggled, where your communities have struggled. So I always tell my clients to tap into your sense of identity, who you related with and how you kind of find your voice in that relationship. It brings a significant sense of empowerment. I also talk to clients around self-awareness. Self awareness is the greatest thing. I could sit here and talk about education, you know get education, get an understanding what's going on in the world and how things unfold in history but I always say to my clients it's about making clients, it's about making sure that you have a greater sense of awareness because the more you have a sense, there's more potential to control how you live your life. If you know what you feel is the first step to knowing why you feel that way. Practice good self-care. Take time out for yourself. Take a walk knowing when to take a walk with your kids and just talk to them about history and talk to them about your journey, talk about them about the areas where times when things are difficult because by you talking to them , you will help them to understand and to embrace the beauty behind their own culture and their sense of who they are. And we must also need to listen. Sometimes as parents, as individuals we spend a lot of times talking. And I just told you to talk so I don't want to contradict myself it's important to talk but it's also very important to listen. Listen to what's going on around you. Listen to what your children are saying. Listen to what your children are feeling. Listen to what your children are bringing to you. And instead of trying to figure it out on your own, one of the things I always say is turn to the

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system. The systems meaning turn to the family, turn to your community, turn to your educators. Turn to your Minister's, ministry's that actually you can relate to. The systems are very important because it does help it to take, it takes the village to raise a child and does help to get people involved. One of the things I want us to know is understanding how your body responds to stress and not putting so much pressure on yourself to have all the answers. Because some of the answers is not based on what's going on in the current moment, it's based on what's been going on for centuries and what's been going on over generation and over a period of time. And it's really important to recognize that you have to give yourself some reprieve that if you don't know how to respond or to support your child or to support yourself around this very difficult time, it's okay to ask for help. It's okay to reach out to the community and say I need to feel a sense of support. Asking for help is very important. Now, next slide.

In summary, I want to share with you that mental health is universal but it's different. It's different for every individual based on their station in life. Based on the hue of their skin not because it is a separation, it's because this is just a way life had worked out. And it's important for them not to be ashamed of the hue of their skin, it's about learning how to celebrate it, learning how to talk about it without feeling guilty or being born a certain color or being from a certain background. Or genes experience play an important role in how we handle stress especially when it comes to toxic stress. How racialized and marginalized bodies are more prone to mental health because of the lack of accessibility when it comes to you know being able to afford to see a therapist like myself or to ask or the culture in which you were brought up in may not be as open to mental health because then it reinforces all the stereotypes they have felt from previous generations. I also want to say it's very important to integrating assistance. They are very important because it helps to change things for the future. Talking to parents, talking to community and talking to those who are you know who are there to offer support is very important to minimize the impact on one's mental health. The other last thing I want to mention is we are all facing difficulties at this time. We are all looking for answers. One of the things that I've learned over the years from Brene' Brown is to learn how to lean into our own vulnerabilities and ask for support it really helps us to grow and find a way to support each other in these very difficult times. Thank you.

Heather: Thank you so much Karen. That's a lot of information for us to all percolate with tonight and there is a number of questions that have come up in the chat box and I am very aware of the amount of time we have. So I've tried to look at them thematically so we can address some of them. I also want to remind people in the chat box we have posted a link to the website at the TDSB that offers resources around mental health and well-being both within the TDSB and within our community.

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