

**FRANCIS W. PARKER CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL**  
**& THEODORE R. SIZER TEACHERS CENTER**

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Dear Parker Students:

Here are a few thoughts about ways to take care of your mental & emotional health during this time of social distancing:

1. **Connect with your friends.** Students report that they are using Facetime more frequently to stay in touch with friends and family. Hearing someone's voice and seeing their facial expressions can be comforting. Keep these connections going... and reach out to grandparents, cousins or other relatives you don't see very often. This an opportunity to rekindle family ties and strengthen the bonds of friendship. If you normally have lunch with certain friends at Parker on a set day, arrange to meet virtually at the same time you normally would during school.
2. **Get outside.** The benefits for mental health by spending time in nature are well-documented. Looking at a sunset, stargazing or going on a walk with the family dog are ways to decrease symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Even looking at natural settings through a window or listening to the sounds of nature have been studied and are beneficial to our wellness. Take a few minutes to enjoy the great outdoors and breathe in some fresh air each day.
3. **Do a random act of kindness.** Doing something small for someone else can help you feel better. Even while practicing social distancing, we can flex our altruistic muscles and lead with kindness and compassion. A kind word to a friend, vacuuming the living room without being asked, helping to cook a family meal or offering to support a peer who might be struggling with a challenging MST problem set – these are just a few ways to not only help others, but to help yourself.
4. **Practice mindfulness.** We talk a lot about mindfulness at Parker. Take time to breathe deeply, calm yourself, and become mindful of the present moment. Practice daily meditation or mindful breathing exercises. Mindfulness can help decrease worry and increase focus. Remember to take life one day at a time. Let's be mindful of thoughts, our words, our online communication and our role as members of our families as well as of our larger Parker community and world. If you want to explore this topic more, helpful apps you can download include Headspace and Calm.
5. **Exercise.** Go for a run, take a walk, dance around your living room or set up indoor/outdoor circuit training. Work on a yoga pose, try doing a plank for a minute or more, or lift weights. Even a little bit of exercise goes a long way.
6. **Make a list.** What are the things you've always wanted to do... but haven't had time to do? Pleasure reading, re-arranging your bedroom, cleaning out a closet, learning French,

painting a landscape, creating music, tinkering with electronics or learning to code are all things that can enrich lives. Students I've spoken with report painting, drawing, working on engineering projects and baking, to name just a few interests. Take time to explore your creative self!

7. **Practice self-care.** Something I notice about Parker students is their unwavering loyalty to and care of their friends. In addition to looking out for friends, self-care is equally important. Make sure you keep up with daily hygiene, set up a doable routine, eat nutritious food and get plenty of sleep -- these are all ways to engage in self-care. Find time to do schoolwork and find time to relax. Everyone's idea of balance differs. What works best for you? And another thing: take it easy on the self-judgement! So many students are incredibly tough on themselves in ways that they would never be with a best friend. We know students are doing their best, so be gentle with yourself if you don't get everything done or understand every piece of schoolwork. It will all come with time. It's important to stay physically and mentally healthy right now. Self-care is of utmost priority for everyone in our Parker community.
8. **Stay positive.** Finding the positive in each day doesn't mean putting on your rose-colored glasses. Optimism is not the same thing as naivete. Optimism in the face of adversity can be extremely helpful to one's overall mental health and wellness. While we don't need to pretend everything is okay all the time (because it isn't!), we can choose to find beauty and light in even the most challenging of situations. Optimism gives us gratitude for what we have right now and hope for what will be.

All my best,

Sheila Kelly

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