

How can we promote health?

Dealing with the corona pandemic in schools and kindergartens

The corona pandemic presents us with completely new challenges worldwide (1). At short intervals, kindergartens, schools and doctors' offices receive new information on how to proceed in individual cases. This information is still specific to each federal state in Germany; it sometimes comes very late and costs a lot of effort to implement. Waldorf institutions must also adhere to these official regulations.

However, there is no reason for these regulations alone to determine our life in school and kindergarten. It is an essential part of the identity and methodology of Waldorf Education that child care facilities and schools are places of healthy development, and this applies emphatically even in the times of COVID-19 (2). The decisive factor for children and adolescents remains the lived attitude of adults: that they exemplify warmth, trust and competence. Therefore we would like to present additional preventive measures and concrete recommendations for strengthening health and dealing with acute infectious diseases in the sense of a concrete pedagogical-medical cooperation.

Children have a right to education and care. At the same time, institutions must ensure that all those involved are protected as well as possible.

Risk of infection

In the meantime, numerous studies have shown that children under 10 years of age rarely fall seriously ill, and above all that they do not pose a relevant risk to their environment even as a source of infection (3-7).

Mask requirements and distance regulation

At this age (under 10 years of age), the mental and physical stress involved outweighs any possible marginal benefits.

Especially for young children, care and teaching without physical proximity and between children and early childhood educators or tea-

chers cannot be reconciled with a healthy pedagogy. In this respect, the distance rule cannot be observed at this age without the risk of lastingly disturbing the children's development. Accordingly, we do not consider the wearing of a mouth and nose protector for children up to the age of 10 years to be reasonable. Where this is nevertheless a regulation, it is worth questioning it in dialogue with the responsible governmental authorities in view of the lack of medical evidence for this. Constantly changing regulations also offer the possibility of flexibility and changeability which were not evident in the past.

For older children and adolescents, the facts and figures regarding COVID-19 infection are largely the same as for adults. However, they too only fall seriously ill in exceptional cases.

Preventive measures to support the immune system

The days are getting shorter, outside it gets colder quickly and finally it is raining again more often. What was so urgently needed for nature, intensifies the worry and the feeling of threat for us humans. For many months the children and also we adults could spend a large part of our time outside in the fresh air. We were able to move around, get some sunlight and enjoy nature. For many families, the time of the lockdown was therefore even a particularly intimate and good time together.

Now we are challenged all over again: The classrooms are ventilated intensively to reduce aerosol contamination. As a result, there is a draft in the rooms and thus an increased risk of catching colds. The best protection against this is appropriately warm clothing, preferably in several layers and made of wool. In contrast to cotton, this has the great advantage that it is pleasantly warm and stays warm even when wet. Warm tea and perhaps warm porridge for breakfast and, despite corona-related difficult eating situations, a warm lunch is essential, also

in kindergarten and school.

If we also look at the care of the soul from the point of view of warmth, it is particularly noticeable how much the corona regulations have brought cold processes into our pedagogy. Many students are currently sitting in front of the screen much longer every day than before the lockdown, often alone. For many of them, closeness and affection are limited to the immediate family circle. Shared religious life, big celebrations with music, dance and joy of life may only take place to a limited extent. Especially singing and actively making music in larger groups are restricted.

We are therefore called upon to develop new ways of warming up the children both externally and internally. On the medical side, there are oil rubs in the evening, e.g. with blackthorn or mal-low oil, warm lavender oil foot baths in the evening, preferably combined with the reading of a story, possibly even oil dispersion baths, and special therapeutic eurythmy exercises. We should also not forget that in suitable clothing we can go out in the cold and wind and even go on impressive hikes.

As far as nutrition is concerned, it is now especially important to harvest, bake and cook a lot together. This creates a warm, active atmosphere. Since this is not possible everywhere at school at the moment due to hygiene regulations, it can instead be a welcome alternative to the computer screen at home. Warm ginger tea with honey, baked apples and hot chestnuts fit in well with the season and combine doing things together with delicious food. It is interesting to note that the apples and grapes that the long summer has brought us this year are extremely sweet - like a special gift of nature to us.

An excellent remedy directly from nature, which can be used for infections in the mouth and throat area as well as for the prevention of all kinds of colds and infections, is propolis, an antibiotic bee resin with which the bees protect their hive from intruders, and which can be purchased directly from the beekeeper.

For the care of the life forces altogether a healthy rhythm and sufficient sleep are of all greatest value. This applies most strongly to the smallest children, but adults also benefit greatly from it. During the lockdown many students, especially in the middle and upper classes, painfully missed that their everyday life was structured and rhythmicized by attending school.

Anyone who is currently ill, be it from COVID-19 or other infections, should stay at home for a sufficiently long time. Only after a good convalescence is the immune system able to deal with new infections. A footbath with increasing

warmth helps with beginning cold symptoms. Further suggestions from anthroposophic medicine can be found on the Internet. A detailed presentation of COVID-19 with therapeutic concepts can be found in a contribution by Georg Soldner and Thomas Breitzkreuz (8) or at <https://www.anthromedics.org/PRA-0939-EN>.

For external applications, chest rubs with bronchial balsam, lavender oil chest compresses and, in the case of a damp rattling cough, possibly also warm quark compresses on the chest are helpful and usually very pleasant for children.

Especially in the case of COVID diseases, warm yarrow compresses for the lungs have proven to be very effective in addition to medical treatment. In general, it is important to take care of the warmth organism when fever occurs and to avoid fever-reducing measures as far as possible. Instructions for the external applications described here can be found on the website www.vademecum.org under „Vademecum of External Applications“. These can also be used by non-medical practitioners without a doctor's prescription.

For mental health we have particularly effective aids in Waldorf institutions: we all know the importance of storytelling or reading stories, especially by candlelight in the early morning. In class, this creates warmth, security and a sense of community. The children can immerse themselves in the story and come to rest.

Art, music, handicrafts, handwork, religion and eurythmy should actually be our „main“ subjects at the moment - after all, they are what we can experience as the strongest antidote to the rapidly increasing intellectualization of the children. The fact that active music-making in particular is so severely restricted by the corona regulations poses a particular challenge. We should continue to try to make music together at least in small ensembles and to hum the songs for Michaelmas, St. Martin and Advent in class.

One last big topic concerns us adults ourselves: it is how to deal with our own fear, which is possibly fueled by the daily news. The children sense whether we adults are afraid and how we deal with it. They orient themselves by the attitude they experience in us. Therefore, it is crucial that we develop an attitude of warmth and trust that strengthens courage and confidence in the children themselves. Could we see this attitude as our task right now?

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