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Resource Sharing Continues

Child Advocates Offer Advice about Protecting Children in COVID-19 Crisis

BREWSTER, NY—A Putnam County Department of Health nurse and Camp Herrlich’s associate executive director, a trained social worker, were among a panel of Putnam experts last week who spoke at the “Community Resilience Coalition Webinar on Children of Putnam and COVID-19: CRC Actions.” The event was hosted by National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University’s Earth Institute and promoted by the Community Resilience Coalition (CRC) with assistance from the Putnam County Department of Health. Nearly 300 registrants poured in over the three-day registration period and with the recent decision to keep schools closed until fall, the information and resource sharing among participants and others will undoubtedly continue.

“We see a huge need for resources to help our children through this crisis,” said CRC community champion Barbara Garbarino. “Our sheltering at home and social distancing are necessary to curtail the virus, but they are not without emotional consequences. Children are

among the most vulnerable in our community. Because of this it was crucial to open our usual quarterly CRC meeting to the public.”

Shanna Siegel, a public health nurse at the Putnam County Department of Health, advised caregivers on how to speak with children about the current crisis. She described an evidence-based approach for answering mindfully. “When faced with a difficult question, take a deep breath and listen closely to your child, while assessing your own values and knowledge,” Ms. Siegel said. “Tap into their level of understanding, by returning the question back to them. With this awareness, you are better able to decide how to answer. Meet your child at their level of understanding, both intellectually and emotionally, but stick to the facts—and be honest if you don’t know the answer. There are a lot of unknowns right now, and sometimes just sharing our feelings about the situation is the best answer.”

Jessica Vanacoro, Associate Executive Director of Camp Herrlich, described how her organization has adapted, moving to a full day childcare program for the children of essential workers and incorporating rigorous health and safety practices, including daily wellness checks, cleaning “go-bags” for staff, and physical distancing measures. “One of the biggest challenges we have faced is with staffing,” Ms. Vanacoro explained. “We have between 20 and 30 children a day and we could conceivably have more, but many of our before and after school staff choose to remain physical distancing at home as recommended.” She went on to answer questions about summer camp: “Our overnight camp will not open this summer, and we are still working and hoping we can adjust, adapt and hold our day camp programs.” Camp Herrlich’s childcare staff are supporting their children with their distance learning activities, camp activities, as well as their social and emotional needs. As a trained social worker, Ms. Vanacoro encourages parents and caregivers to sit in the discomfort with their children. “It’s important to acknowledge and

accept children's feelings, empathize with them, and avoid over-reacting or being dismissive by saying, 'don't worry, everything will be alright,'" she said.

Carol Snyder, Regional Safety Technician for Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, also described her agency's work with the six Putnam school districts to successfully roll out their remote learning systems. BOCES had spearheaded planning efforts for possible scenarios where the school might need to close over influenza for a short period of time. This previous planning was key in providing necessary tools for this pandemic.

To view the webinar video or read the transcript, visit the website of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Earth Institute at <https://ncdp.columbia.edu/>. or directly on the RCRC COVID-19 Webinar Series page: <https://bit.ly/rcrc-c19webinars>.

For information about the CRC visit: <https://putnamcountyny.com/health/community-resilience-coalition/>

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