



# NAVIGATOR'S NOOK

by Sarah Joseph, Family Support Navigator

## How's your Coping Capacity?

We've all heard the old adage about the straw that broke the camel's back. As we move into 2022 with more changes and uncertainty, I thought it might be a good time to reflect on how much straw we are all carrying right now. This morning I saw a meme that said "nothing is normal, no one is ok, you're doing great" and from the number of shares and likes this meme had acquired I gather it's pretty darn relatable. So, let's start there.

Let's acknowledge all the straws that everyone is carrying right now, because a lot of it isn't normal, a lot of people are struggling and everyone is doing their best to show up in their roles (student, parent, partner, teacher, EA, leaders, admin, support, etc.).

### **Extra Straw you might be carrying: (not an extensive list)**

- Constant changes in protocols at work
- Constant changes in health regulations
- Following restrictions and protocols
- Keeping up with new information
- Emotions surrounding restrictions
- Fear of getting sick or family members getting sick
- Financial stress
- Loneliness/Isolation/Boredom
- Did I remember my mask? Did my child sanitize before having a snack?

### **That's a lot of extra mental load you are carrying around there!**

I think we can all agree that we are able to function and thrive in everyday life when we carry little or no straw. When we are carrying little or no straw, we are able to learn effectively, play, and relate well to ourselves and others. We have the coping capacity to deal with everyday stressors, such as tantrums, our car breaking down, having staff call in sick, etc. But right now, when we are already carrying a lot of extra straw, any additional stress and straw that is added to our backs (yes, we are all camels in this analogy) makes it more difficult to learn, play, or handle small stressors. Thus, our coping capacity is decreased.

The ability to deal with stress and anxiety can be referred to as your coping capacity.

Everyone has a lowered coping capacity right now. That's the new norm. That's our reality.

- If you are experiencing less patience as a parent or teacher right now - that's normal!
- If your kids are misbehaving or resisting or having more meltdowns right now - that's normal!
- If you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed and like you need a break - that's normal!
- If you are feeling emotionally exhausted - that's normal!

But those feelings are not what I want to normalize. I want to normalize acknowledging where we are at and what we can do to put down some of that straw, even if it's only for an hour or a day.

### **Ways to put down the straw and increase your coping capacity:**

- Talk about the straw you carry with someone you trust (remember venting is different and can actually amp you up instead of calm you down)
- Create language and understanding within your classroom, workplace, or family about this idea of carrying straw
- Sleep/Rest
- Exercise
- Get creative: Draw/Write/Paint
- Laugh and Play
- Connect
- Unplug
- Get outside - even just for a few minutes

What are the things that you know help you put down the straw and feel refueled? Do them! Make a big old list of all the things that help you release stress - post it somewhere that will remind you to do them. Even if you have to pick up that stress again the next day or hour. Make room for more straw, and give your back a rest. The weight of the straw causes a lot more damage if you never take a break from holding it.

