

SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

The following resource is created from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and material created by School Mental Health Ontario.

Please also see this resource from School Mental Health Ontario, [How to support student mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Children and youth may experience a range of emotions during the COVID-19 situation. Here are some tips and resources to help you support your child or youth during this time.

IN CASE OF CRISIS:

Call 911

Visit your local hospital emergency room

McMaster Children's Hospital: Child and Youth Mental Health Emergency Services (CHYMES)
McMaster Located within the emergency department for youth age 17 and younger.
1200 Main St W, Hamilton, ON L8N 3Z5

FOR URGENT SUPPORT:

Kids Help Phone

24/7 counselling and information service for young people.
Crisis Line 1-800-668-6868; kidshelpphone.ca; text CONNECT

COAST Hamilton

Mental health crisis outreach and support for all ages.
Crisis Line (905) 972-8338; coasthamilton.ca

FOR NON-URGENT SUPPORT:

[HWDSB Helps](#) is a free and anonymous way for students to find help for themselves and one another. Concerns may relate to student mental health, bullying, substance use and more. The service receives anonymous messages and shares the report during regular school hours with staff who follow existing Board and school protocols. This is not a crisis line or counselling service.

- Text to 905-963-0066. Standard rates apply.
- The HWDSB Helps app for iOS and Android.
- Web chat In case of emergency, call 911.

HWDSB Helps priority during COVID-19

- HWDSB Helps remains an operational service. However, we are prioritizing concerns related to COVID-19's impacts on school communities during our closure under Ministerial Order. If a concern relates to school matters generally, we will respond when school is back in session.

Information about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving as new details are confirmed and new questions emerge. Having information and knowing how to be prepared can reduce your stress. This resource will help you think about how an infectious disease outbreak might affect your family—both physically and emotionally—and what you can do to help your family cope.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. COVID-19 is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that is mainly spread person-to-person. Currently, there is no available vaccine, so the best preventative strategy is to avoid exposure.
- So far, children appear to be much less affected by COVID-19.
- Children with pre-existing illnesses may have different risk, so you should discuss this with your child's medical team.
- To reduce the spread of the virus, a variety of approaches will be used, including staying home as much as possible, physical distancing (staying six feet away from others), avoiding close contact with those who are sick and promoting healthy hygiene strategies.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Keep updated about the outbreak and recommendations from the following:

- [City of Hamilton](#)
- [Province of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)

HAVE ALL FAMILY MEMBERS PRACTICE PREVENTIVE BEHAVIORS INCLUDING:

- Frequent hand washing for 20 seconds with soap and water (length of the A-B-C song) or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick. Stay home when sick.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or cough or sneeze into crook of elbow.
- Keep basic health supplies on hand (e.g., soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and a thermometer).
- Make sure you have a sufficient supply of regularly taken medications.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD:

- **Stay calm.** Children look to us for how to respond to stressful situations. Remember that when you are calm, you help your child to remain calm. If you are feeling overwhelmed or extremely worried, you too might need some additional support. Think about ways to manage your stress.
- **Keep it simple.** The COVID-19 situation can feel overwhelming and complex. Information has been coming quickly. Break it down for your child/youth by focussing on what is most important to them. For example, explaining that cancellations are happening to help keep them and others in the community safe, telling them that by washing their hands regularly they are helping everyone, etc.
- **Listen.** Let your child express how they are feeling by validating their emotions and helping label them i.e. "I can see you're feeling worried" or "it is okay to feel angry that you can't go to your friends house today." Some children might not know the words to identify their different feelings and so you can help them by saying "I wonder if you might be feeling worried, or sad?" and, "what might help you feel better?"
- **Keep information age-appropriate.** Answer their questions as factually as possible but keep responses age-appropriate. Balance the facts with reassurance. Your child needs to know that they, and you, are safe.
- **Limit exposure.** Avoid listening/watching news coverage or having adult conversations with young children around. Encourage older children to be aware of their social media use and to take breaks. Help them sorting rumours from facts.
- **Try to establish a flexible routine for your child.** This might include a regular, but relaxed, time for waking and sleeping, and perhaps for meals and snacks. Playing and talking together can help everyone to feel more relaxed.
- **Be patient and understanding.** You may notice behaviour changes in your child. Children react differently to changes in routine and stress. They may become frustrated or more emotional, or engage in things they did at a much younger age. Your child may just need more reassurance and calm during this time.

SUPPORTING YOUTH

- **Be patient and understanding.** Social connections are very important to many youth who are dealing with less social contact and cancelled events. Try to be patient and understanding – validate their feelings. Instead, listen and express compassion.
- **Encourage balance.** Some youth may turn to Netflix, social media or gaming as a distraction from the day-to-day reality of social distancing—this is to be expected and will be helpful at the current time. However, taking breaks from screen time and maintaining proper sleeping habits is still important.
- **Pause before talking.** With so much news coverage and talk about COVID-19, over exposure is very possible. You can provide a break for your youth by not discussing the situation in front of

them unless they want to talk about it.

- **Listen and provide reassurance when you can.** Some youth may be worried about the health of their friends and family members, about the size of the pandemic locally and globally, or about loss of freedom by having to stay home. If they express concerns to you, listen to their concerns and try to provide reassurance. You can talk about how measures are in place to keep people safe.

SELF-CARE AND COPING FOR ADULTS:

- Remember, you are a role model for your children. How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.
- Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation and focus on what you can accomplish.
- Shift expectations and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment.
- Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation
- Try to control self-defeating statements and replace them with more helpful thoughts.

SCHEDULING AND ACTIVITIES

- Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
- Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- Help your family engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with your family and cultural values, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities.
- Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of getting ill, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.

SIGNS MY CHILD OR YOUTH MIGHT BE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH:

- Changes in behaviour or emotions that seem out of proportion even with the current circumstances (e.g., angry outbursts, depressed mood, sense of panic).
- The changes last most of the day, every day.
- The changes last for a sustained period of time (e.g., more than a week)
- The changes seem to interfere with your child's or youth's thoughts, feelings or daily functioning – for example, they may not do activities they normally enjoy, they're crying more than usual, or they may not interact with you as much as they usually do.
- Your child or youth tells you they're feeling sad or anxious a lot.

If your child or youth expresses thoughts of hurting them self or engages in suicidal behavior, seek help immediately by calling Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) at 905-972-8338, your family doctor, take your child/youth to Emergency Room or 911.