

How can I support my child in this stressful time?

Caregiver considerations around the novel coronavirus/COVID-19

The introduction of the novel coronavirus/COVID-19 in Alberta has led to a wide-spread response by our governments, Alberta Health Services, schools, and community leaders. Facility closures and program changes have caused significant disruptions to the lives of many families. This may lead to increased stress in our homes and increase concerns in our children and youth.

As parents and caregivers, it is not always easy to turn our attention toward thinking about wellness when faced with uncertainties around health, work, finances, child care, etc. In times like these, parents and caregivers have a unique opportunity to model self-regulation and resiliency for our children. By being intentional about how we respond to challenges, we can help our children to build resilience and develop their own positive social stories about themselves, their communities, and 'the bigger picture'. Here are some tips to consider as you are supporting your family in this special time.



TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING ABOUT COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

Manage your own anxiety.

Be aware of your feelings and take time to calm yourself before talking with your child.

Speak calmly and reassuringly.

Use a calm voice and let your child know they can safely share their concerns and thoughts with you.

Follow your child's lead.

Find out what your child already knows. Ask questions geared to your child's age level. Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in. Some kids want to talk, some don't and that's OK. Let your child know you are there if they want to talk.

Validate your child's feelings.

Your child may be stressed by the ongoing news and talk about COVID-19, sickness, and death. Your child may be upset at the change in routine or the loss of activities they were looking forward to. Help your child to recognize and honour these feelings. Share your feelings in appropriate ways and model positive coping. Help your child to know that together, we can manage our feelings in tough times.

Offer both comfort and honesty.

Focus on helping your child feel safe, but be truthful. Do not make false claims or promises about what's going on. If your child asks a question you don't know the answer to, say so. Use up-to-date information from reputable sites such as www.albertahealthservices.ca to share information with your child on what we can do to protect ourselves.

Be mindful of your child's access to media reports.

Limit news exposure to what is needed in order to have up-to-date information. For older children who want to follow the news, watch/read reports with them so you can help them make sense of the information.

Focus on what we are all doing to stay safe.

Talk about your family's good health practices. Explain how changes in our access to services are for our best interest and that our communities are working hard to care for one another.

Sources: <https://childmind.org> / <https://kidshealth.org> / <https://www.unicef.org.au/>

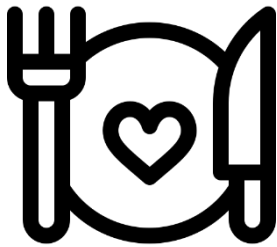
TEACH YOUR FAMILY ABOUT GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES

- Wash your hands often and well for at least 20 seconds/use hand sanitizers when hand washing is not available
- Avoid touching your face, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people (social distancing of at least 2 metres/6 feet)
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched
- Stay at home if you are feeling ill or if you have travelled outside of Canada recently; practice self-isolation in accordance with the latest government mandates
- Contact your primary health provider or Health Link 811 if you have questions/concerns about your health
- When sick, cover your cough and sneezes and then wash your hands



Source: www.albertahealthservices.ca

PROVIDE STRUCTURE AND ROUTINE AS YOU CAN



Where your child's routine can stay the same, keep it the same.

Wake up and bedtimes, meal times, chores, family moments – familiar routines can help a family feel more secure. Even small daily routines – morning greetings, getting dressed, favourite foods, bedtime stories - can give a sense of normalcy in changing times. Traditions and special occasions may have to be adapted but they should still be acknowledged and celebrated.

Where your child's routine has changed, introduce new routines they can count on.

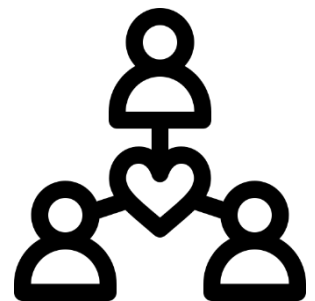
Replace regular activities that have been cancelled with new family activities your child will still look forward to. Stay positive and be creative. Involve your child in planning and building these new activities into your week. You and your child could make a colourful family calendar or daily routine chart to help them remember and prepare for these changes.

Ensure basic needs are met around sleep, eating, and exercise.

Any changes in our child's routine (even with regular school closures such as for summer vacation and winter break) can often mean a change to our child's routines around their basic needs. Ensure that your child's routine still allows for a healthy sleep schedule, regular balanced meals, and heart-pumping movement throughout the day. While everyone is encouraged to stay home more in accordance with government mandates, we can still play outside in the backyard, step outside to stretch and take a deep breath of fresh air, and appreciate nature.

Be intentional about maintaining healthy socializing.

Although we are encouraged to practice social distancing to stop the spread of this virus, healthy socializing is essential to our well-being. Be intentional about creating times of connection for your child with friends and family – through phone calls, FaceTime, or online through emails and social media. When children are sad that they cannot be with their friends or family, encourage them to talk about these relationships, draw pictures of them, or talk about activities they will do together in the future. Show them that though we may be apart for a while, we are not alone.



**Support your child's learning.**

Stay in touch with your child's school and any online learning goals or accommodations that educators are providing. Support your child to follow a daily routine to complete modified coursework and continue reading.

Access educational and informative programs and websites that engage children and youth while reinforcing skills and promoting learning. Common Sense Media and the Edmonton Public Library have provided some great links to online tools:

- <https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/10-great-free-websites-for-elementary-school>
- <https://www.epl.ca/blogs/post/schools-out-8-online-resources-to-keep-your-kids-learning/>

Monitor your family's screen time.

In times like these, our technology is such a helpful resource for communication, learning, information, and entertainment. As parents, we sometimes use our devices (phones, tablets, computers, gaming consoles, and TV) to keep our children busy so that we can get our own tasks done. However, screen time cannot replace the one-on-one time that children and youth need from parents for healthy development. Also, it's easy for all of us to lose track of the time when we are engaged with our screens. Be intentional about how often, how long, and for what purpose media is used in your home. For more information on how to build your family's media plan, go to

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>

**Schedule your own daily self-care.**

In change and uncertainty, we know that parents want to do all that they can to protect and comfort their children. We cannot do this as effectively if we are continuously overwhelmed and exhausted ourselves. It has been wisely said that 'you cannot pour from an empty cup.' To give your best to your child, you must be filled by having your own needs met. Do all you can every day to get sleep, eat well, move your body, and connect with people that support you. Reflect on your physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational wellbeing and tend to areas that need your attention. Be gentle with yourself. Notice moments of beauty, laughter, and generosity with your child, family, and community.

Additional Resources:

Talking with Children: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

Help in Tough Times: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page16759.aspx>

What to do if you are anxious about coronavirus/covid-19:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/what-to-do-if-you-are-anxious-or-worried-about-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Helping Children Manage Anxiety Related to COVID-19:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocddWZuLYbw&feature=youtu.be>

Short book (PDF) to help explain COVID-19 to children: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>



For up-to-date information about the novel coronavirus / COVID-19, and to access the online self-screening tool, go to

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>

If you have concerns around health symptoms, call Health Link at 811.