

Protecting Your Mental Health

How to help you and your children cope?

The COVID-19 situation can be challenging for many of us, including our kids. It is normal for them to feel stress during this time with so many changes in their lives.

There are some things that we can do to help our kids get through these times. And the good news is that the [resilience and coping skills](#) they learn now will help them later in life as well.

1. Realize that your children may experience many different emotions.

This is not a normal situation, and it is normal for your children to feel emotional right now. Help your child decrease their [stress](#) by getting enough [sleep](#), [eating healthy foods](#) and staying active.

Take a few minutes to ask how they are doing and look for changes in their behaviour.

- Are their emotions a lot stronger than before? (e.g., angry outbursts, depressed mood, sense of panic)?
- Do the changes in behaviour or emotions last most of the day, every day?
- Do the changes last for a sustained period of time (e.g., more than a week)?
- Do 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 may cry more than usual, or they may not interact with you as much as they usually do.
- Does your child or youth tell you they're feeling sad or anxious a lot?



“If you can take time at the end of the day, just to sit with someone and say ‘we’re all feeling uneasy now and I thought maybe’ – some youth may turn it away but others don’t – ‘I’m just going to sit here and if you want to say something you can and if you don’t, you don’t have to.’ - Dr. Gail Beck, Psychiatrist at The Royal, interview (part 1) with Daniel Alfredsson

<https://youtu.be/AhenU-D0ddc?t=155>

2. Be patient with yourself and with your children.

Try to keep calm with your kids and help them to understand the current situation as best you can. But realize that you may also be feeling stress and pressure at this time. Be patient with yourself and look for supports.

Help your child to be more [resilient](#). For example, try some deep breathing or meditation techniques together. Try to write one thing you are thankful for every day and refer to this list if you are having a bad day. For more information on how to support your children, visit our [Parenting in Ottawa](#) site.

“These are extraordinary times. During times like these, the basics are really important – proper sleep, good nutrition, and exercise. Each member of your family will cope in their own way. Remember to give each other space in whatever way you can manage. If possible, have a space that is ‘adults only.’” - Ann-Marie O'Brien, Professional Practice Lead and Social Worker at The Royal. <https://www.theroyal.ca/news/covid-19-qa-maintaining-mental-health-big-family>

3. Maintain a routine.

As much as possible, keep a similar routine to the one that you had before the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, try to go to bed and wake up at similar times every day. Having a routine will help both you and your children during this time.

“The one thing I’ve heard from everyone, every youth, and now my grown up sons, is for them to have a routine. So we are finding in the program, that the young people who set their routine early, are doing best.” - Dr. Gail Beck, Psychiatrist at The Royal, interview (part 1) with Daniel Alfredsson <https://youtu.be/AhenU-D0ddc?t=52>

4. Focus on things you can control.

We cannot control the pandemic or what others do, but we can help our child(ren) think about what they can control.

- We can control what we eat and put healthy food into our bodies
- We can control how much time we spend watching the news or on social media
- We can wear a mask to protect others
- We can wash our hands frequently
- We can help others
- We can try to control our thoughts and use positive self talk

5. Ensure that you build in some fun into their day.



Make sure to have fun with your kids everyday. Balancing home schooling, work, and other pressures can be overwhelming. Take breaks and have fun with your kids. Try a board game, dance or sing together.

“One thing my son spoke about and the athletic youth in our program spoke about was the need for ongoing exercise. To use it to break up a day, there’s a lot of evidence that something active in between periods of learning, really helps consolidate learning.”

Dr. Gail Beck, Psychiatrist at The Royal, interview (part 1) with Daniel Alfredsson, <https://youtu.be/AhenU-D0ddc?t=97>

6. Stay connected with loved ones.

Even if you cannot visit your loved ones in person at this time, it is important to stay connected. Call or text your family and friends or stay in touch through social media. Consider video chats as a way for your kids to see their loved ones. The Royal has some great tips here:

<https://www.theroyal.ca/great-big-list-things-can-help-you-cope-while-practicing-physical-distancing-and-self-isolation>



7. Seek out more support if you need it.

It is normal to feel the stress and pressure of this situation. If you need support please call the [Distress Centre Ottawa and Region 24/7](#) - 613-238-3311 (Bilingual) or [Tel-Aide Outaouais](#) - 613-741-6433 (French).

One of the biggest challenges for people seeking mental health, substance use, and addictions services is knowing where to go. That's why health care partners, community service providers, and people with lived/living experience have worked together to create [AccessMHA.ca](#), a simple new single point of entry to eastern Ontario's system of care for mental health and addictions.

[Counselling Connect](#) provides quick access to a free phone or video counselling session. This service is for children, youth, adults and families in Ottawa and the surrounding area. There is no waiting list.

You can also call The Walk-in Counselling Clinic at 613-755-2277 or go to [walkincounselling.com](#). They have free counselling in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Somali, Cantonese and Mandarin. No appointment needed.

[PLEO](#) We help parents of children facing mental health challenges find their way forward. We provide Family Peer Support through integrated services specifically designed to support parents when, where, and how they need it, and to work together so that parents can move seamlessly between them.

For more support and information visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVIDMentalHealth](#)

If you are looking for additional mental health services for youth, children and families please contact 613-260-2360 or 1-877-377-7775 and the online chat at [chat.yvb.ca](#). For children under 12, please contact Crossroads Children Mental Health Centre at 613-723-1623 or visit [crossroadschildren.ca](#).

For additional resources, visit [Ottawa Public Health: Mental Health Resources for Parents](#); [Ottawa Public Health: Mental Health and Substance Use Services and Resources](#); [Ottawa Public Health: Multilingual Mental Health Resources for Diverse Communities](#); [Parenting in Ottawa: Mental Health](#); [The Link Ottawa: Mental Health](#); [have THAT talk](#); and [School Mental Health Ontario](#).



Mental Health - Care & Research
Santé mentale - Soins et recherche

This fact sheet has been modified since it's original publication and some additional information has been added from [Child and Youth Mental Health During COVID-19](#).