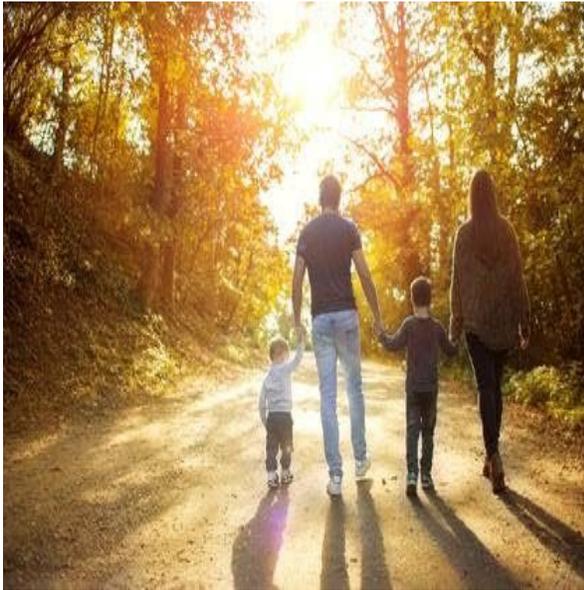


# Supporting your Child's Emotional Wellbeing During Times of Stress

## Information for Parents and Caregivers

March 30, 2020

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### **Dear Parents and Caregivers,**

Public health emergencies are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept and this global pandemic is unlike anything we have experienced in our time. Understandably, many young children feel frightened and confused. As parents, teachers, and caring adults, we may feel like we lack the sense of what to do to help the ones we love and care for. However, in most situations, people respond best by being connected to the ones with whom we feel most safe. As adults, we can best help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent, and supportive manner. Fortunately, most children, even those exposed to loss or illness, are quite

resilient. By creating an open environment where children feel free to ask questions, we can help them cope with stressful events and experiences and reduce the risk of lasting emotional difficulties. There are no “right” or “wrong” ways to talk with children about such public health emergencies. However, here are some suggestions you might find helpful.

### **Listen, Protect, and Connect**

Children learn from watching their parents and teachers, they will be very interested in how you respond to news about the coronavirus outbreak. They also learn from listening to your conversations with other adults...even when you don't know that they are listening!

You can help your child if you Listen, Protect, and Connect: the three steps of “psychological first aid” for your child. These steps can help your child bounce back from this.

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## Listen

- Create an open and supportive environment where children know they can ask questions
  - It is best not to force children to talk about things until they are ready
  - Answer their questions honestly using words and concepts that are age and developmentally appropriate. You don't need to have answers to all the questions.
  - Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Asking the same questions over and over may be a way for a child to ask for reassurance or to make sense of the situation.
  - Try to clear up any confusion your child has; let your child know that he or she is not to blame
  
- Just Listen and Be Present:
  - Listen with ears, eyes and heart--let your child know you are interested in what he or she thinks and feels, and listen attentively when your child talks to you
  - When your child is experiencing emotions, don't explain, lecture or interrupt
  - Help kids name emotions and tell the story about what they feel. This supports making sense of their experience and feeling more in control.
  - Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting the disease, anxiety, and stress are normal reactions to a stressful situation
  - Normalize their experience

## Protect

- Limit access to media (social media, print, tv) that are constantly discussing the public health crisis.
  - The repetition of media can be disturbing and confusing
  - Although adults may follow the news and daily updates with interest and attention, most children just want to be children--they may not want to think about what's happening around the world
  
- Talk to your child about what is going on to make him or her safe
  - Let children know that there are lots of people helping others affected by the coronavirus outbreak. It's a good opportunity to show children when something scary or bad happens, there are people to help.
  - Practice and model good hygiene and preventive behaviours (washing hands well, coughing and sneezing into your arm or tissue, staying home)
  - Find ways for your child to feel helpful to your family and others (helping around the house or neighborhood)

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- Talk about common reactions that adults and children may have during and after a disaster.
    - No two people have the same reactions to situations
    - Some people become quite irritable, some act more detached, and others may act very differently from how they normally do. It's normal to feel out of sorts in trying times.
  
  - Maintain “normal” daily activities and routines as much as possible
    - Limit unnecessary changes. Try to keep your family’s schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
    - Take a break once in a while from talk and activities related to the crisis
    - Maintain healthy sleep habits, healthy eating habits and stay hydrated

## Connect

- Consider ways to maintain important social connections (while physically distancing)
  - Relationships with friends and family members are essential for both your and your child’s mental health
  - There are many options for connecting through online platforms (social media, email, Zoom, Facetime, Kid Messenger)
  - It’s a great time to learn the art of letter writing and telephone etiquette!
- If your child is having a difficult time coping with the outbreak and want to seek further help, please reach out to your child’s teacher or principal
- Build fun into the family, so that you and your kids can enjoy positive and satisfying experiences

## Self Care and Coping

Remember... adults are role models for children--how you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their own fears and worries. Feel confident in shifting expectations and priorities of yourself and others at this time. Life is not proceeding in normal fashion and it’s necessary to do what you need to keep a sense of joy and fun.

- Go slow and take little breaks to manage this new reality
- [Managing Your Anxiety Around Covid-19](#) - Interior Health
- Reach out to your support networks online or by phone - stay connected!
- Reduce your exposure to the news - [Tips for When the News Stresses You Out](#)
  - Use reputable sources for information - [Government of Canada](#), [CDC](#) or [WHO](#)
- Find joy in doing things you love and maybe trying something new

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## Resources and Help:

- [Tips for Talking to your Kids](#) - Interior Health
- [Well Being Tips for Children and Their Families](#)
- [Taking Care of Yourself](#)- Tips for Helping School Aged Children After Disasters
- [Tips for When the News Stresses You Out](#)
- [www.anxietycanada.com](http://www.anxietycanada.com)
- Ministry of Children and Family Development 1-800-663-9122
- For up-to-date information regarding financial assistance and social services
  - [Government of Canada](#)
  - [Government of BC](#)