

Ways to Manage Stress and Anxiety and Support Our Children

The COVID-19 pandemic may be a very stressful and frightening time for our children. While it is important to remember that fear and anxiety about disease is normal, excessive worry is not. All individuals will respond differently during stressful times, and anger, confusion and guilt are common ways children respond to world events. However, there are many things we can do as parents to support our children during these extraordinary times. All individuals manage stress in different ways. When stress becomes unhealthy certain actions may arise. Signs of unhealthy stress include, significant fear or worry, change in sleeping patterns, change in diet or eating patterns, change in overall health, and even substance abuse.

When talking to our kids about the current situation, a solutions focused approach is crucial. Things to keep in mind when having these discussions include:

- Many things are being done to help the current situation (governments, doctors, nurses, schools, ...)
- It will get better
- Life will return to normal
- Focus on caring for our family and friends

Here are some ways to support our children:

1. All Children
 - i. Routines are important and can help to create a sense of predictability and security. Some examples of routines include scheduling daily academic time, outdoor activities and family time. Focus on the moment, mindfulness (sit quietly and focus on breathing and your senses)
 - ii. Role model calmness, routine, and a focus on family and friends
 - iii. It is appropriate to provide a fact-based discussion on the changing landscape of COVID-19. This discussion should be done in a calm and reassuring tone conveying the message that we are safe. We take precautions, but we are safe. Listen, provide age-appropriate information and focus on prevention (daily handwashing, social distancing)
 - iv. Focus on the positive, change in outlook from: 'we are stuck inside' to a focus on family and home
2. Older Students
 - i. Social Media: limiting social media and news watching. Watching the news together can provide an opportunity for conversation and help to keep things in perspective. Moderation in gaming time
 - ii. Nutrition: eat as healthy as you can. Make balanced meals that you can prepare together
 - iii. Sleep: try to ensure that older students are still getting enough sleep. www.sleepfoundation.org

3. Younger students

- i. Stress: younger students may show their stress in different ways. For example; crying, irritation, 'acting out', reduced attention and concentration, regression to an earlier age such as bedwetting, and ceasing activities that they previously enjoyed
 1. Strategies to help reduce stress in younger students:
 - More time with trusted adults
 - Increased play time, inside and out
 - Routines
 - Quiet times, to read books, listen to music, puzzles and playing board games
 - Adequate sleep

Younger children may scare more easily than older children so focusing on the positive can be very helpful. As an example, the American Television personality, Fred Rogers (Mr. Rogers), had a famous quote: "when I was a boy, I would see scary things on the news, my mother would say to me, look for the helpers, you will always find people that are helping."

Finally, our kids will feel safer if they express their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. One of our jobs as parents is to role model resiliency, and during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can do our best to be calm and caring. Our children are looking to us to see how we react. Therefore, if you are struggling with stress and anxiety over this pandemic, then it is important that you also seek help. Some resources are listed below. As well, check with your employer to determine if they have counselling services available through local Employee and Family Assistance Programs.

Local supports:

Kids help phone: 1-800-668-6868

Child Youth and Mental Health: (250) 549-5404

School counsellors: after the spring break, please contact your local school

Crisis Line: 1-888-353-2273

Family Resource Centre: (250) 545-3390

NOYFSS: (250) 545-3572

Respectfully,

Joe Rogers, Superintendent of Schools

Dr. David Smith,

Natashia Bacchus, District Behaviour Specialist/Mental Health Consultant, (250) 540-1863

Doug Rogers, District Substance Abuse Prevention Counsellor, (250) 549-6179