



Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board – Suggestions to Support Your Child during COVID-19

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Families across the country are adapting to the evolving changes in daily life caused by COVID-19. As you support your child through this challenging time, here are some suggestions from **School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO)** and the **National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)**.

- **Stay calm.** Children look to the adults in their lives for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If you remain calm, it will help your child remain calm. Think about ways to manage the stress you might be carrying (e.g., focusing on your faith, talking with a friend, going for a walk, practicing gratitude) so that you can be at your best to support your child. If you are feeling overwhelmed, pause and take a breath before speaking with your child.
- **Limit exposure.** Avoid listening to or watching news coverage about the pandemic with young children present, and avoid having adult conversations about your own worries in front of them. Encourage older children to be aware of their social media use and to take breaks from it. Help them to think critically about what they are reading on-line and separate myths from facts.
- **Follow your child's lead.** Look to your child to determine whether or not they want to have a conversation about the situation. Sometimes, we all need a break.
- **Keep it simple.** The situation is complex and a lot of new information coming at us daily. You can help your child by breaking it down into more manageable pieces and focusing on the things that are most important to them. For example, remind them of everything you are doing to stay safe, explain that cancellations are happening to help keep them and others in the community healthy, and tell them that by washing their hands they are helping others.
- **Be honest and accurate.** Answer questions as factually as possible, but keep responses age-appropriate.
 - **Early elementary school children.** Provide brief, simple information that balances facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people are taking to stay healthy.
 - **Upper elementary and early middle school children.** This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor. Discuss the efforts in place to prevent germs from spreading.
 - **Upper middle and high school students.** Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to reliable sources of information. Provide honest, accurate, and factual answers to questions. Engage them in decision-making about family plans and scheduling, and helping with chores at home.
- **Foster a sense of control.** Explain simple safety steps. Providing guidance on what your child can do to prevent infection offers a sense of control, which can calm anxiety.
- **Establish a flexible daily routine.** Keeping a regular schedule promotes a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. Encourage regular sleep habits, exercise, time together as a family, and time learning something new. This can take some planning at first as new schedules are being established.
- **Encourage balance.** Children may turn to videos, social media, or gaming as a distraction from the day-to-day reality of social distancing. This is to be expected—and you may find yourself looking for distractions, too! Take breaks from screen time. Be aware that too much social media exposure can negatively impact well-being.
- **Listen.** If your child expresses concerns, let your child talk through how they are feeling. Acknowledge their emotions and help label them. You can say, “I can see you’re feeling worried,” or “It’s okay to feel angry that you can’t see Grandma right now.” Some children may not talk easily about their feelings or have the vocabulary to identify and label them. If you notice behaviour that isn’t typical of your child, say, “I wonder if you might be feeling worried or sad?” and, “What might help you feel better?”

May God Bless You and Your Family



- **Be patient and understanding.** Children react differently to stress and changes in routine. Some may become frustrated more easily or more emotional, or engage in behaviours typical of a younger child. Try to be understanding. Listen, acknowledge your child’s feelings, express compassion, and offer reassurance and calm.
- **Focus on the positive.** Celebrate things like having more time to spend together as a family. Notice the ways people are helping each other every day.
- **Offer lots of love and affection.**

Most children will manage well with the support of parents, caregivers, and other family members, even if they show some worry, or difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Sometimes, however, children may need more support. Here are some signs to watch for:

- Changes in behaviour or emotions that seem out of proportion, even given the current circumstances (e.g., angry outbursts, depressed mood, sense of panic).
- Changes that last most of the day, every day, for a sustained period of time (e.g., more than a week).
- Changes that interfere with your child’s thoughts, feelings, or daily functioning. For example, they may not participate in activities they normally enjoy, cry more than usual, or stop interacting with you as much as usual.
- Your child tells you they are very sad or anxious.

If your child is experiencing a mental health emergency, expresses thoughts of self-harm, or engages in suicidal behavior, seek help from a mental health professional **immediately**. Call 911 or go to the emergency room of your local hospital. Here are some additional sources of support.

- Kids Help Phone – call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.
- Peel Region's network of service providers for child and youth mental health services - <https://wheretostart.ca/>
- Your family doctor for information about local services.
- The Children’s Mental Health Ontario centre in your community for support virtually and by phone.
- Ontario 211 for information about local services.
- Kids’ Help Phone’s *Resources Around Me* for information about local services.

Reliable Sources of Information on COVID-19:

Public Health Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html
Ontario Ministry of Health	https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus
Peel Public Health	https://www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/

Further Information on COVID-19 and Mental Health:

School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO)	https://smho-smso.ca/blog/how-to-support-student-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
National Association of School Psychologists	https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)	https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19#coping
Children’s Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)	https://www.cmho.org/blog/blog-news/6519918-talking-to-your-anxious-child-about-covid-19