



PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR PARENTS: MENTAL HEALTH, COVID-19, AND REMOTE LEARNING

As we all look to find our footing in supporting our kids to be healthy and learn in new ways, here are some evidence-based ideas that can make this process easier for the whole family:

CREATE AND MAINTAIN A ROUTINE

Most of us can benefit from maintaining a consistent daily routine. Our brains gravitate toward certainty, and clear routines offer comfort through predictability. Some ways to build routine include:

- Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day
- Getting 'ready' for school the same way we normally would
- Maintaining regular meal times
- Designate some sort of consistent learning or "classroom space" in your home, preferably in a quiet place away from obvious distractions (TV, video-games, phone, etc.)
- Help kids "buy-in" by having them help create a schedule for the day and week
- Consider breaking up the school day with preferred activities spaced throughout. Try using the preferred activities as rewards for when the work gets done.

MAKE IT VISUAL!

Visuals help reduce stress and anxiety by giving a clear idea of what activities will occur during a given day, and when. Some ideas for your consideration:

- Post daily schedules you have developed to reflect the realities of school and home, including time and duration of activities
- Colour code schedules if you have more than one child
- Use visual timers and clocks to mark the completion of activities
- Remember: be intentional in balancing academic and preferred activities/down time as well. Ensuring emotional safety and security will help your child to succeed in many areas of life, including academics, and are invaluable elements in building their resilience over this challenging time

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION

Connection is a basic human need, and right now, children are much more likely to have **unmet** needs for connection and belonging than ever before:

- Encourage daily voice and video calls with friends
- Consider having your child use Zoom and its white board and screen sharing features to study/do homework or play a game with friends

- Consider recording a video or greeting that your child can send to relatives, and ask your relatives to do the same for your children
- Kids and teens often worry more about family and friends than themselves. For example, if kids hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Encourage them to connect.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF, HONOUR YOUR OWN NEEDS

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events, so parents need to ensure that they have the mental and emotional energy to respond to their children's needs and changes in behaviour:

- There is no road map for this - trust your instincts!
- Whenever possible, honour yourself by taking some personal time each day to manage your own stress and re-charge your battery
- As much as possible, maintain your own sleep-wake and healthy nutrition-hydration habits
- This may be a great opportunity to learn something new, take up a new hobby, dive into that project you've been putting off, etc.

STAY ACTIVE

While social distancing is essential, creating opportunities to stay active is equally important. There is abundance of information on the benefits of exercise and mental health. Some ideas might include:

- Online workouts or yoga classes
- If you're comfortable going outside, go for walks, runs, bike rides, or hikes
- Creating simple obstacle courses or physical activity circuits around the home (e.g., Google "spell your name workout" for a simple list of physical activities to incorporate into reading and spelling activities)
- Investing in simple pieces of equipment such as a skipping rope or rebounder, or use household items for heavy work activities

MONITOR AND RESTRICT ACCESS TO COVID-19 INFORMATION

Some information is important, but too much (and sometimes inaccurate information) creates undue stress and anxiety:

- Consider limiting checking media sources to once a day, at a certain time, to add to a sense of routine and structure
- Focus on reputable sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), coronavirus.gov, or the BC Center for Disease Control
- It may be helpful to be with your child when they are searching for information to help them find proper sources of information, correct or challenge misinformation, and discuss anything they want to discuss

- Put news stories in context. If they ask, explain that death from the virus is still rare, despite what they might hear. Watch the news with your kids so you can filter what they hear
- Also be aware of how much conversation is happening in your home that your children may overhear

CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL!

Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe, and focusing on solutions rather than problems can be really helpful in times of uncertainty. Children also learn by imitating adults, so consider implementing some of these behaviours yourself:

- Stay home (particularly if you are sick) and limit contact with other people
- Teach, practice, and reinforce the basics of hand washing for 20 seconds (count, set a timer, sing the alphabet, sing the Happy Birthday song twice, or find something other mantra to make it fun, pre-existing or self-derived)
- Practice, remind, and reinforce them to try not to touch their face, eyes, mouth, and nose
- Practice and remind them about covering coughs and sneezes with our elbow or a tissue and not our hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray, wipe, or diluted bleach (1:9 bleach and water mixture)
- Practice gratitude for what you do have and what you are able to do. Focus on the positive
- Practice contribution by pointing out the people who are helping and plan a way to help others with your child

PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE

Children can practice getting their own needs met - they can really surprise you with how well they can learn and perform tasks of self-care. This is an ideal time to let them practice! Some ideas here include:

- Having a snack bowl stocked and ready for them to visit, and some simple lunch ideas they can complete for themselves or with a bit of help
- Having them work independently on school-related tasks **without** an adult beside them helping at all times. Try giving them this room to grow, which helps create a bit of breathing space for you too!

WATCH FOR SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN BASELINE BEHAVIOUR

Some change in behaviour is anticipated during this unusual period:

- As well, many students may be experiencing some degree of fear and worry around COVID-19 itself. For most students, a brief conversation with trusted adults at home about their COVID-19 related emotions will suffice.

- In some cases, students may require more support. If you are noticing a **significant and sustained (frequency, duration, intensity)** change in the baseline behaviour of your child, have a conversation with your school and tell them what you have observed
- For further information, see the “What to do When Your Child is Struggling” handout

Some sources for further information:

<https://smho-smso.ca/covid-19/parents-and-families>

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/covid19_stressmanagement_5_accessible.pdf

<https://resiliencebydesign.com/helping-kids-cope-with-covid-19-by-dr-robin-cox/>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/mental-well-being-information-resources.pdf>