

Children and teens will be affected by the stressors, anxieties and fears that come with global events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people often worry about family and friends more than themselves. Important routines and social connections have been disrupted by restrictions and the stable, predictable family supports that are essential for resilience may be compromised. Broad media coverage and easy access to frightening images, videos and stories, as well as the emotions of caregivers, can exacerbate these fears.

PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO PARENTS

Encourage parents and caregivers to reach out to you or other healthcare providers if they are concerned about a child's mental health. Advise them of the below approaches.

Be alert for signs of worry

- Younger child, bedwetting, thumb sucking, tantrums, problems with eating or sleeping, headaches and stomach aches.
- Teens: moodiness, changes in sleeping and eating, headaches and stomach aches, wanting to isolate, and increased risk-taking or use of harmful substances.

Hold a reassuring conversation

- Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Be curious, listen, and talk with them in age-appropriate language. Help them to understand, verbalize and organize their own feelings. Validate their feelings while giving reassuring information.

Empower children

- It is important for young people to feel a sense of control. Outline the steps that children and teens can take to keep themselves healthy, such as:
- Appropriate, frequent handwashing (show them how and when—try to make it fun)
- Physical distancing (but not “emotional distancing”)
- Disinfecting surfaces
- Not sharing food, drinks, makeup or other personal items
- Limiting TV and social media
- Encourage structured daily routines in the absence of usual activities.

SUPPORT THE FAMILY: TAKE A SOCIAL HISTORY

Worsening economic conditions created by the pandemic are increasing risk for, and rates of, child poverty, food and housing insecurity, parental mental health difficulties, and family violence. Be mindful of privilege when advising on coping techniques – some families do not have private access to outdoor spaces, internet, computers, etc.

Family physicians should inquire about social determinants of health and family stressors. Questions can include “Do you have difficulty making ends meet?”. For further guidance on this issue, see the [Poverty Tool](#) on the BCCFP website.

TEEN MENTAL HEALTH

Advise teens of the following behaviours and techniques to decrease stress:

- Exercising and eating regularly.
- Avoiding excess caffeine intake.
- Relaxation exercises, such as box breathing.
- Learning to state feelings in polite but assertive ways, e.g. “I feel angry when you yell at me.”
- Developing practical coping skills, such as breaking a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks.
- Challenging negative thoughts with alternative neutral or positive thoughts, e.g. “My life will never get better” can be transformed into “I may feel hopeless now, but my life will probably get better if I work at it and get some help.”
- Learning to feel good about doing a competent or “good enough” job rather than demanding perfection. Encourage them to have realistic expectations of both themselves and others during the pandemic.

The [Foundry](#) offers young people ages 12-24 health and wellness resources, services and supports—online and through integrated service centres across BC.

WHEN MORE HELP IS NEEDED

[Compass Mental Health Services](#) through BC Children's Hospital can provide immediate access to a team of mental health providers including child psychiatry on weekdays. Call 1-855-702-7272.

[Child and Youth Mental Health \(CYMH\)](#) services are being provided virtually, or by phone, allowing patients to receive services safely in their homes.

[Kids Help Phone](#) offers 24/7 counselling services via phone (1-800-668-6868), text (“CONNECT” to 686868), and online chat.

Local crisis lines can be found at www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/looking-for-local-resources-support/

[Keltly Mental Health Resource Centre](#) at BC Children's Hospital has excellent resources to support parents and caregivers dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BCCFP COVID-19 Resources: www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19
www.caringforkids.cps.ca
www.covidwithkids.org
openmindbc.ca
www.raceconnect.ca

SOURCES

www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/66_helping_teenagers_with_stress.pdf
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/the-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19
www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/what-paediatricians-can-do-to-support-children-and-youth-during-the-covid-19
www.thechildren.com/health-info/conditions-and-illnesses/how-support-kids-mental-health-during-covid-19-pandemic
www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_10