

# CARING FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

during the COVID-19 pandemic

Children and youth react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.



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## WATCH FOR SIGNS OF STRESS IN YOUR CHILD

- Common changes to watch for include excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, and difficulty with attention and concentration. For more information, see the “For Parents” section of the CDC’s [Stress and Coping](#).
- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and [share facts](#) about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Go to the CDC’s [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies](#) or [Talking with Children About COVID-19](#) webpages for more information.

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## WATCH FOR BEHAVIOUR CHANGES IN YOUR CHILD

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviours they have outgrown (such as toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviours in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

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## TEACH AND REINFORCE EVERYDAY PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

- Parents and caretakers play an important role in teaching children to wash their hands. Explain that hand washing can keep them healthy and stop the virus from spreading to others.
- Be a good role model—if you wash your hands often, they’re more likely to do the same.
- [Make hand washing a family activity.](#)
- [Learn more about hand washing](#) and other everyday preventive actions.

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## WATCH YOUR CHILD FOR ANY SIGNS OF ILLNESS

If you see signs of illness consistent with [symptoms of COVID-19](#), particularly fever, cough or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider and keep your child at home and away from others as much as possible. Follow CDC’s guidance on [what to do if you are sick](#).

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## HELP YOUR CHILD STAY ACTIVE

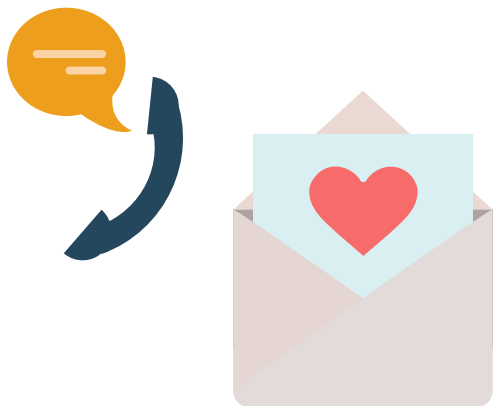
- Encourage your child to play outdoors—it’s great for physical and mental health. Take a walk with your child or go on a bike ride.
- Use indoor activity breaks (like stretch breaks or dance breaks) throughout the day to help your child stay healthy and focused.



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## HELP YOUR CHILD STAY SOCIALLY CONNECTED

- Reach out to friends and family via phone or video chat.
- Write cards or letters to family members they cannot visit.
- Some schools and nonprofits, such as the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) and [The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#), have resources for social and emotional learning. Check to see if your school has tips and guidelines to support your child's social and emotional needs.



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## STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

- Many schools are offering lessons online (virtual learning). Review assignments from the school and help your child establish a reasonable pace for completing the work. You may need to assist your child with turning on devices, reading instructions and typing answers.
- Communicate challenges to your school. If you face technology or connectivity issues, or if your child is having a hard time completing assignments, let the school know.



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## CREATE A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE AND ROUTINE FOR LEARNING AT HOME



- Have consistent bedtimes and get up at the same time, Monday through Friday.
- Structure the day for learning, free time, healthy meals and snacks, and physical activity.
- Allow flexibility in the schedule—it's okay to adapt based on your day.

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## CONSIDER THE NEEDS AND ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED FOR YOUR CHILD'S AGE GROUP

- The transition to being at home will be different for preschoolers, K-5, middle school students and high school students. Talk to your child about expectations and how they are adjusting to being at home versus at school.
- Consider ways your child can stay connected with their friends without spending time in person.

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## LOOK FOR WAYS TO MAKE LEARNING FUN

- Have hands-on activities, like puzzles, painting, drawing and crafts.
- Independent play can also be used in place of structured learning. Encourage children to build a fort from sheets or practice counting by stacking blocks.
- Practice handwriting and grammar by writing letters to family members. This is a great way to connect and limit face-to-face contact.
- Start a journal with your child to document this time and discuss the shared experience.
- Use audiobooks or see if your local library is hosting virtual or live-streamed reading events.



# ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH

Growing concerns about COVID-19 are certainly prevalent in the media, social conversations and our own thoughts. Information is being used to make ever-changing decisions about how to keep people safe. Along with all of the information, there is also an abundance of unknowns. High levels of uncertainty can generate fear and other emotions.

Children and youth with anxiety disorders may find the information around them especially worrisome. It would be most beneficial for them if information is presented in a calm, structured and realistic manner. With that in mind, the most reassuring way to manage this information is in conversation with their parent(s) or caregiver(s).

If further assistance is needed, here are some organizations that can help:

- ➡ What's Up Walk-In services are being provided via telephone or video during the extended hours of 9:00AM to 7:00PM, Monday to Friday.
- ➡ Mental Health Toronto now has a single phone number for callers seeking counselling services. This new number is 1-866-585-6486. This number is also the new central line for What's Up Walk-In clinics. Callers will be immediately connected to a counsellor for service via phone or video in the interim and/or in person when pandemic safety measures have been lifted.
- ➡ Children's Mental Health Ontario agencies are open and providing support virtually and via phone.  
[Click here to find a Children's Mental Health Centre near you.](#)
- ➡ There is also a free e-book for children that explains COVID-19.  
[Click here to access the downloadable PDF.](#)





# LINKS TO ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

[Audible](#): free audio books and audio stories

[PLAY Calgary](#): activities and games to keep people physically and mentally active, including 200+ activities to do with your kids, at-home activity packs for families and virtual services with recreation therapists

[Ontario Science Centre](#): fun and educational science-based collection of resources, from do-it-yourself experiments to free online movies

[LEGO](#): downloadable activity calendar with daily building challenges

[Sunny Side Up](#): collection of virtual activities, performances, games, lessons and more

[California Academy of Sciences](#): resources for educators

[YMCA of the Greater Toronto Area](#): free daily Facebook live classes for the whole family

[Google Arts and Culture](#): virtual reality experiences of artwork and museums

[Cirque de Soleil](#): numerous videos of past shows and behind-the-scenes looks

[The Roberta Bondar Foundation](#): free learning materials and activities for photography and environmental exploration

[Seussville](#): Dr. Seuss-themed games, crafts and activities

[Nomster Chef](#): illustrated recipes designed to help kids age 2-12 cook with their grown-ups



For more resources and activities, contact us at [ask@anbu.ca](mailto:ask@anbu.ca)

