



Coronavirus and Mental Health

Tips for Staying Mentally Healthy¹

Pandemics, like COVID-19, challenge the way people cope. During a pandemic it's not uncommon to experience strong emotions. Psychology helps us to understand normal responses to abnormal events – this can help Albertans cope. Novel and unfamiliar threats provoke anxiety and even unrealistic fears and racism. Social distancing, effective communication, and public health measures are realistic lines of defense.

Stay informed, not overloaded¹

With major news events, media inundates us with coverage and potential implications – that can create additional stress. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Framing risk with clear facts helps quell panic. Alberta Health Services, the World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, and the US Center for Disease Control are all reliable information sources. Minimize unnecessary exposure to stories or gossip about the pandemic.

Stay healthy¹

A healthy lifestyle is your best defense against disease. Physical health has positive impacts on psychological health (and vice versa). Social distancing and good personal hygiene will keep you, and others, safe.

Managing your own stress¹

- Limit your media consumption to just enough to stay informed. Take some time for yourself, go for a walk, or spend time with friends and family doing things that you enjoy.
- Avoid getting into discussions about the event if you think they have the potential to escalate to conflict. Be cognizant of the frequency with which you're discussing the news.
- Stress and anxiety about the future is not productive. Instead, work on issues you care about.
- Remember that life will go on. People have always survived difficult life circumstances. There is no reason why this situation cannot be similar. Avoid catastrophizing and maintain a balanced perspective.
- Build your resilience – we can learn to adapt well to stress – how have you coped with stressors before? Add resilience tools to your tool bag to manage life's adversities.
- Have a plan -- How would you respond if you or a loved one were diagnosed with COVID-19? Developing contingency plans for potential scenarios can lessen your anxiety.

Common reactions to distress²

The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children. Children who were directly exposed to a disaster can become upset again; behavior related to the event may return if they see or hear reminders of what happened.

For infants to 2 year olds

Infants may become more cranky. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 6 year olds

Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviors they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents/caregivers. They may also have tantrums or a hard time sleeping.

For 7 to 10 year olds

Older children may feel sad, mad, or afraid that the event will happen again. Peers may share false information; however, parents or caregivers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on details of the event and want to talk about it all the time or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

For preteens and teenagers

Some preteens and teenagers respond to distress by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may cut back on how much time they spend with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents/caregivers or other adults.

For special needs children

Children who need continuous use of a breathing machine or are confined to a wheelchair or bed, may have stronger reactions to a threatened or actual disaster. They might have more intense distress, worry or anger than children without special needs because they have less control over day-to-day well-being than other people. The same is true for children with other physical, emotional, or intellectual limitations. Children with special needs may need extra words of reassurance, more explanations about the event, and more comfort and other positive physical contact such as hugs from loved ones.

Ways you can support your child²

- 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.
- Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

Seeking Professional Help¹

Psychologists, therapists, and other mental health professionals are trained to help people find constructive ways of dealing with anxiety and emotional stress. Contact a mental health professional if:

- You feel overwhelming nervousness or lingering sadness adversely affecting you
- You notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness and you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities and activities.

Help Lines

- Alberta Health Services, Provincial Helplines, Addictions Helpline Medical Information Services, Gambling Addictions Helplines, Parenting Helplines: [1-866-332-2322](tel:1-866-332-2322)
- AHS Health Link: [811](tel:811)
- Kids Help Phone: kidshelpphone.ca or [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868)
Crisis Text Line: [686868](tel:686868)
- Crisis Services Canada, Suicide Prevention and Support [1-833-456-4566](tel:1-833-456-4566)

Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

For the well-being of our employees and eligible family members, NLPS provides an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) which can help with many concerns and problems. The service is provided through Homewood Health. The program can help with personal and employment problems, including those associated with stress, anxiety, and depression. More information can be found on the NLPS website at nlpsab.ca/staff/efap.

References:

- 1 Psychological Coping during a Pandemic - Psychologists' Association of Alberta
- 2 cdc.gov/coronavirus

Resources for Parents and Children

Thrive Mobile App

Developed by the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, this app provides parents with a resource to help adolescents increase ownership over their own health, including mental health

Healthy Children (healthychildren.org)

Sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics, this website provides a wide-range of resources for parents of teens and young adults.

National Institute of Mental Health (nimh.nih.gov)

Working to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses, NIMA's website provides guides and brochures directed at parents. NIMA also currently has several COVID-19 related articles and featured topics.

Teen Mental Health (teenmentalhealth.org)

Geared towards teenagers, this website provides learning tools on a variety of mental illnesses, videos, and resources for parents and caregivers