

Using Social Emotional Learning to Help in Times of Stress Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Stress can be defined as the physical, behavioural and mental responses we have to perceived threat of our safety and well-being. While stress, in smaller doses, allow us to become more focused and attuned to things around us, stress in higher doses or for prolonged periods can be counterproductive to our daily routines and relationships. Adults and children alike can become overly sensitive and reactive in times of heightened stress. Social emotional competencies can help us regain an improved sense of calm, of 'team', and certain aspects of control.

Self Regulation- It is important for adults to help children make sense of what they hear and understand from social media. Sharing accurate, age appropriate information* to minimize anxiety and fear can help others feel calm and better equipped to deal with difficulties. Give simple instruction of how to keep themselves and others healthy (stay away from those who are coughing, sneezing or sick; staying home or away from large public gatherings; to cough into their elbow or into a tissue; washing hands frequently for at least 20 seconds; refraining from touching your eyes, mouth or nose or eating without washing your hands first; if feeling unwell, to stay at home). Also, model actions that is helpful for calming body and mind (e.g., deep breathing, visualization, physical exercise, aroma therapy, etc.). Remain calm and reassuring as children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will look to you for cues of how to respond as you are communicating with them and with others.

*Remember that in times of heightened stress, the level and amount of information we can handle diminishes significantly. Information and messages about safety and security are best to be simple and straightforward.

Recognition of Feelings- Children may have strong, uncomfortable feelings around fear of becoming sick, or loved ones becoming ill. Relaying that it is natural to feel unsure and nervous in these circumstances can help children use language to express discomfort rather than inward or outward behaviour. Ensure you also talk about what actions are being taken to ensure their safety and well-being and that feelings of assuredness and hope are also conveyed and modeled. Keep in mind that children may likely be confused with the information they are hearing, and unusual or poor behaviour may be the result of this distress. Take time to talk to children about good practices for staying well and answer their questions in a calm, assured manner. As it's best to keep some distance between each other in these next days, what are ways we can express feelings of friendship and connection without hand touching ('elbow' greetings, waving, special word greetings)?

Sense of Hope and Community- Try to follow usual routines, adding any protocol for safe practice. Routine helps us feel calm. Relay actions that they can control to minimize risk of sickness, and actions others are doing (parents, educators, scientists, doctors, etc.) to ensure the health and safety of our communities. Stories and examples of how others (historic, locally, personally) have successfully managed fear, anxiety, sickness may be helpful to bolster confidence and positivity in children.



What is COVID-19 in Kid-Friendly Language?

- COVID-19 (also called Coronavirus) is a new virus that doctors and scientists are still learning about.
- This virus has made a lot of people sick, but scientists and doctors think that most people will be okay, especially kids. Some people may get pretty sick.
- Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy. It's important for all of us to work together to follow instructions on how to be well.
- For most people who do become sick with COVID-19, it will feel like the flu; a fever, cough and sometimes having a hard time taking deep breaths. Most people who have gotten the virus have not gotten very sick but it may take a couple of weeks to feel better again. Only a small number of people who get it have had more serious problems.