

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Learning Supports for Families

It is easy to become overwhelmed when attempting to navigate through the daily information shared about the COVID-19 pandemic. This document was created to provide support for parents/guardians when sharing information about the coronavirus with young and school-aged children.

General Information about COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

Please visit the [Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19](#) website for the most up-to-date information. The following links may be of interest to families:

- [About COVID-19](#);
- [Social Distancing](#);
- [Self-monitoring](#); and,
- [Self-isolation](#).

If symptoms feel worse than a standard cold, see a health care provider or call HealthLine at 811. If HealthLine 811 recommends you seek acute care, they will provide instruction to call ahead.

The Government of Saskatchewan has a [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) to determine if individuals should be tested for COVID-19.

As of March 20, 2020, the Saskatchewan Chief Medical Officer **imposed a public health measure that all travellers returning from international destinations, including the United States, are subject to a mandatory self-isolation order.**

Be cautious of scammers and criminals who may try to use the coronavirus panic to defraud the vulnerable, particularly seniors. Authorities would not and will not sell identifying information about COVID-19 patients, and tests for the virus can only be administered by health authorities. Please remember not to give out your health card and credit-card numbers if anyone posing as the Public Health Agency of Canada offers to sell a prescription for COVID-19 prevention; there is currently no treatment or drug available to fight COVID-19.

For further information, please refer to:

- [Government of Saskatchewan](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

Talking with children about COVID-19

News about COVID-19 is everywhere. While young children may not be able to grasp too many facts about the viral pandemic, they no doubt are able to understand that their routine, and that of their family, has changed. They may also feel anxious about what they *do* comprehend, for example, the fact that many people are getting sick. Older children can perhaps understand much of the information presented in the media, but they may be feeling confused as they sort through materials that they see and hear, and anxious about the future. While adults want to share truthful information, they may be unsure of when to share, how much to share, or ways to share. The following sections provide ideas for talking with children, ages 5 – 9 and ages 10 and older.

Before undertaking any of the suggested activities with your children, please visit the [Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19](#) website for the most up-to-date information regarding public spaces, interacting with others and social distancing.

Children ages 4 -9 years old

Note: Questions in this section are from the perspective of the child.

What is Coronavirus?

- Discussion Points:
 - It is a virus like having the flu or cold.
 - It is spread by germs.
 - There are ways to stop germs from spreading.
- Activity Suggestions:
 - Ask your child to tell you what they know about germs and how to help stop them from spreading (e.g., coughing into their elbow, staying home when they are sick, washing your hands).
 - Together make a poster with the title *I Stop Germs When I*. Add ways to stop the germs and then hang the posters around the house.
 - Watch and discuss the video “Germ Smart” (click [here](#)).

Am I going to get sick? Are you going to get sick?

- Discussion Points:
 - Discuss what is being done to stop the spread of germs in your household and community (e.g., staying home from school, only going shopping for important things like food, medicine and household supplies, staying away from playgrounds and large groups of people).
 - Talk about keeping space between people for the time being.
- Activity Suggestions:
 - In the house practice what social distancing means (e.g., meeting up with others when outside – space, smile, small talk).
 - Create a plan in case of sickness – if you get sick this is what I will do – if I get sick this is what I want you to do.

Why can't I play with my friends who are not sick?

- Discussion Points:
 - Sometimes people can spread the germs without being sick.
 - We are not sure who people have been in contact with or where they have been.
 - We do not want our friends to feel bad if they passed germs onto us or if we passed germs onto them.
- Activity Suggestions:
 - Setup online groups for children with friends and schoolmates.

Why are you not going to work? Are we going to be poor?

- Discussion Points:
 - Review conversations about social distancing and stopping the germs from spreading.
 - Talk about setting priorities – what we need to stay healthy, cutting back.
 - Talk about how people in the community and the government help.
 - If appropriate, discuss:
 - what it means to work from home;
 - being laid-off; and,
 - unemployment benefits.
- Activity Suggestions:
 - Make a list of items – have the child separate them into needs/wants.
 - Brainstorm different ways to help people in the community (e.g., ways to check-in on people who live alone, offering to pick-up groceries for neighbours).

Children ages 10 and older

How do I begin to talk with a child about COVID-19?

- Invite children to talk and ask questions. They may have found out a lot about COVID 19 already, and may have numerous questions about the reliability of what they know, and specifically how COVID 19 affects them.
- Share information in an age-appropriate way, being truthful, but at the same time without being sensational.
- Watch for signs of anxiety in a child, and while assuring them that it is natural to be worried or scared about a serious issue, it is also a time when you, as a caregiver, will do everything you can to make sure the family is safe. Be aware that you are setting the emotional tone of the conversation.
- Remember to avoid language that might blame others in any way. Talk about how some information we have access to might be inaccurate or based on rumours.

What if I can't answer their questions or if we are confused about information in the media?

Take this as an opportunity to explore reputable websites together. Students over the age of 10 are capable of researching reliable informational sites, preferably together with an adult.

- The [Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19](#) website and [Government of Canada website](#) give updates, information on risk, symptoms and treatment and also offers a section on Canada's response to the pandemic.
- The [World Health Organization Coronavirus website](#) offers advice about protecting yourself, travelling, research, and even on busting myths related to COVID 19.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) contains [reliable information](#) under headings such as "What You Need to Know" and "Resources for the Community."

What are some positive things we should be talking about during this time?

- There are always those around us who are the "helpers." Look for stories of people who are working to keep our communities those who are helping people with acts of kindness.
- Brainstorm ideas of ways to be caring and compassionate in your community. Could you write a cheerful message to someone? Share your artistic talents through social media? Draw a picture to display in your front window? Write a chalk message on the sidewalk?
 - [Voices of Youth](#) is an example of a site where youth are sharing positive messages.
- Focus on what individuals can do to stay safe. Children will have already heard about the importance of washing hands, cleaning surfaces, not touching their faces and staying home and away from other people. Emphasize to children how they can do their part in containing the spread of the virus.

- Find ways to have children stay in touch with friends and extended family members. This may be as simple as a phone call or through many other forms of technology. Enjoy socializing, even at a distance.

What if my child seems anxious during and after our conversations?

- Remind children that they can talk to you anytime. Even if conversations are difficult, you will always listen and care about them and their concerns.
- Try to remain calm and in control. If you are feeling anxious yourself, reach out to family, friends or others in your community who will help you relax before continuing your conversation with a child.

For further information, please refer to:

- [Parenting in the Time of COVID-19](#)
- [How to Talk to your Child About Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for Parents/guardians, School Staff, and Others Working with Children](#)
- [Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)
- [Hand Washing Video](#)

Ways to Support Child and Family Mental Wellness

The COVID-19 pandemic is extremely challenging as it is disrupting school and work life, daily routines, activities all the elements of normalcy that solidify our lives. Children especially will find this time confusing and scary. They may also sense the anxiousness and fear in adults. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that it is normal to experience some level of anxiety and fear. It is also essential to express this to children.

How can I help children manage stress?

- Keep informed but be mindful of information overload.
- Look for accurate and credible sources (see below) and avoid unfamiliar websites and social media sources that sensationalize information.
- Try to deal with problems in a structured way to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Identify concerns and divide the problems into more manageable parts such as, things that need to be done today, ones that can wait until another day and ones that can be dropped.
- Seek out positive connections with others who will not increase your anxiety and fears.
- Foster resilience (ability to overcome or recover from significant challenges) in yourself and in children and try to avoid worst case scenarios.

What can families do to maintain normalcy during this stressful time?

- Seek balance and involve children when establishing a healthy home routine that includes exercise, planning times for unplugging from the media and keeping regular sleeping schedules.
- Routines do not need to mirror a day at school.
- Blend learning with daily chores, tasks and projects.
- Build relaxation and physical activities into daily routines.
- Engage children in empowering activities.
 - Involve younger children in daily chores that give them responsibility and feel they are contributing to the family well-being, such as helping with the dishes, planning meals, playing games or reading to younger siblings.
 - These [resources for families](#) offer ideas about how to support children with routines and expressing emotions and feelings.
 - This [parental resource](#) offers tips for families including age-appropriate responses to common questions, a guide to self-care, and activities for young children experiencing social distancing.
 - Involve older children with home projects such as, preparing healthy meals, organizing and leading family physical activities, meditation and relaxation sessions, or board game sessions. Visit [here](#) to see some tips.

What can be done if further support is needed?

- Sometimes a family member may still continue to struggle to cope. If you feel someone is experiencing symptoms of intense or excessive anxiety encourage them to consult with a health expert.
- There are also other community supports available such as, family doctors, clergy, psychologist and community mental health facilities.

For further information, please refer to:

- [Saskatchewan Health Authority](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#)
- [Anxiety Canada](#)
- [Canada Mental Health Commission](#)