



Mental Wellness During COVID-19

For Parents and Children

COVID-19 has created a lot of uncertainty and changing circumstances that makes for very difficult times in First Nation communities. We are especially vulnerable with the threat of this virus. It is likely that you may experience some mental distress at some point during this crisis which can take a toll on your mental health. We have a strong history of resilience and strength as First Nations people. Many nations look to take care of self by ensuring all aspects of body, mind, spirit and emotions are attended to for overall health. We have many cultural strengths to draw upon to stay connected and keep well, even while we practice social distancing.

In First Nations culture, our children are our future and we all take care of the children. They are always close and we often teach them by modeling. When we connect in this way with our children, we create a sense of hope, belonging, meaning and purpose.

There may be children or young people in your life who experience distress. As a trusted adult, you can help reassure and educate them about COVID-19 – it can be good to talk to them now, so they can understand the illness and be reassured. If you feel the child or young person is getting distressed through this conversation, reassure them, provide accurate information, and provide strategies on ways to manage their feelings.

Here are some suggestions when helping children through this time:

- ◇ Storytelling. Share your knowledge about your culture, call an Elder who will tell stories or read to your children
- ◇ Learn and share traditional knowledge. Learn outdoor survival skills. Share what you know about the plants, animals and land around you.
- ◇ Incorporate ceremony. Smudge every morning, do sunrise ceremony, and check in with others to reaffirm your love and relationships.
- ◇ Kind words and thoughtful gestures help. Use non-physical ways to show love to people while practicing social distancing.
- ◇ Practice your traditional songs and language.
- ◇ Integrate life skills. Teach young ones how to do daily household chores, cooking, cleaning and yardwork.
- ◇ Children learn so much through play and are especially happy when their parents and caregivers join in the fun.
- ◇ Model self-awareness and mindfulness. Scan your body and name where you are carrying your feelings. Then set unhelpful feelings down into the land.

Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak

Rumor and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control. Some reputable sources might include:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news>

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/>

You can get up-to-date information and advice on the virus here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/>

<https://www.afn.ca>

Remember:

Children react to stress differently than adults – they may withdraw or behave in a more ‘babyish’ way (regress), seem anxious or clingy, be preoccupied with illness in their play or drawing, have problems sleeping or nightmares, or may get physical symptoms such as stomach aches or headaches.

Here are some tips for supporting children and young people:

1. **Reassure** them they are safe.
2. **Encourage** them to talk about how they feel.
3. **Tell them they can ask questions** and answer these in plain language appropriate to their age, be honest but avoid details which may distress or cause anxiety.
4. **Tell them that feeling upset or afraid is normal**, it’s good to talk about it and that they’ll feel better soon.
5. **Be understanding** – they may have problems sleeping, throw tantrums or wet the bed – be patient and reassuring if this happens. With support and care, it will pass.
6. **Give your children extra love and attention.**
7. **Remember that children look to their parents to feel safe and to know how to respond** – reassure them, share that you are upset too but that you know you will all be fine together.
8. **Try to keep to normal routines** – mealtimes, bedtimes etc. – allow them to get out and play, to go for a walk, etc....
9. **Help your kids feel in control** – encourage frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, covering cough and sneeze and practicing social distance. Young people, particularly adolescents, may feel the need to meet up with their peers as a way to avoid boredom or to manage their emotions. Talk to your teenager about what social distancing looks like, why it is necessary and identify other ways of socially connecting with their friends like FaceTime or other video chats.

However, if a child’s distress is escalating or they are displaying any worrying behaviours (such as extreme withdrawal, terror that you cannot comfort them from etc.), seek help early. Check with your local health center if there is any way to access online support for you and your child if their behaviors are worrisome or escalating and you can’t manage them alone.

Know That This Will End

Right now, the pandemic may feel endless, we need to remind ourselves and our kids that it will end. Although we do not know the specific timeline, the need for social distancing, closures and the life changes we are currently experiencing are not permanent. Knowing this makes it much easier to cope.

A teaching to help understand what we are going through with the COVID-19 crisis.

When a bear goes into hibernation, they do it for the health of their community and themselves. In the winter, food is scarce, hibernating allows other animals to have access to the limited resources. It slows the spread of disease and viruses among other animals during a season when immune systems are lowered, and energy is limited.

It is also a time of conserving health for the bear, a time for reflection... it is a time that allows you to renew, to undergo change, to honour your place in life and food cycles.

It is not a time for anxiety or fear. When it is time for hibernation, a bear can finally relax. All of the stress of finding food, territory, and a mate disappears. The bear believes that they have done enough and trust in themselves. They know this process is necessary and they will come out the other side renewed.

Be the bear. Stay home. Rest. Know you are doing this for something much bigger than yourself.

Reach Out!

Here are some helpful numbers if you need to talk or chat.

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Hope for Wellness Helpline: 1-855-242-3310

Text CONNECT at 686868

First Peoples Wellness Circle

www.fpwc.ca

Nipissing First Nation, 857 Yellek Trail North Bay, ON P1B 8G5

Tele: (705) 313-4942 Toll Free: 1-833-311-fpwc