

Anxiety in Children and Youth during COVID-19

Anxiety is normal, and can help with planning ahead and solving problems. However, when children or youth are worrying too much or avoiding fun activities, it can be a problem. Parents and caregivers play an important role in helping children manage anxiety during the pandemic.

Watch for behavioural changes

- Unusually quiet or withdrawn.
- More crying, irritability, aggression or acting out.
- Frequent headaches, stomach ache or body pains.
- Avoiding activities they enjoyed in the past.
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

Role model effective ways to manage stress and anxiety:

- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy, stay active and get enough sleep.
- Check your own emotions. Recognize your own fear, anger and anxiety, and calm yourself before talking to your children.
- Manage your own anxiety. Practise deep breathing and relaxation techniques, talk to someone you trust, and seek professional help if needed.
- Avoid using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope.

Strategies to help your child cope:

- Show them love and affection. Soothe them when they are upset, and help them calm their emotions.
- Encourage them to talk about their worries and fears. Talk about a situation where you observed some signs of anxiety in them. Explore their thoughts and feelings about the situation, and try to understand how they are feeling.
- Be reassuring. Acknowledge their fears.
- Identify and challenge their anxious thoughts and help them come up with more realistic thoughts.
- Develop a plan together to help them face their fears and manage their anxiety.
- Be patient and flexible.
- Minimize their exposure to things that cause worry and anxiety, such as the media.
- Focus on what they can do to protect themselves and stay safe during COVID-19.
- Keep a schedule, and have structure and routines as much as possible.
- Teach them coping and self-regulation skills such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation.
- Spend quality time together every day.
- Reach out for support.

For more information or support

- [Supporting Youth with Anxiety Disorders during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Canadian Paediatric Society)
- [Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators](#) (Government of British Columbia)
- [Healthy Parenting](#) (Toronto Public Health)
- Call Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week