

PARENTING AND COPING DURING CORONAVIRUS



The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is extremely stressful for parents and caregivers. You have the stress of juggling your day-to-day responsibilities while also caring for your children or youth at home. You are also helping their kids understand and cope with changes to their daily routines due to social distancing.

The good news is that there are many healthy strategies you can do to support your kids and survive as a parent during this stressful time.

Key things for parents to do

Remember not to focus on things outside your control like:

- whether or not other parents (or adults) are following the 'rules'
- what other adults (or parents) are doing
- whether or not there is hand sanitizer at the store
- how long this will last

On the other hand, focus on all of the things you can do. There are many things you can do to keep your kids connected to people and activities that give belonging, purpose, hope and meaning.

Be a model of calm

First thing's first, try to remain as calm as possible. It will be harder for the kids to stay calm if the adults around them are stressed out. And, if your children are stressed out, they will be less open to whatever routines, guidance or direction you want to give them.

Limit news exposure

Modern mass media with 24/7 news coverage is overwhelming for adults, let alone children.

- limit your access to news, as too much news is stressful
- limit your children's exposure to the news – don't have news reports going on in the background
- get information about coronavirus from reliable sources such as Ottawa Public Health, the Centre for Disease Control and Health Canada. CHEO's website is also an up-to-date resource for families

Stay connected

Maintain your own sources of connection, purpose, hope and meaning, whether it be other adults, or simply ensuring you have some daily time set for self care.

- video chat with friends and family

- ask for help if you are feeling overwhelmed
- practice yoga or meditation for 10 minutes before the day starts, or before bed

Talk to your child about coronavirus

You might say:

- “We haven’t had a chance to talk about coronavirus, and I’m guessing maybe you had some questions about it.”
- “Do you have any questions for me about what is going on?”

Key messages for you to share are:

- the adults in their lives are doing their best to keep them safe
- there are things they can do to feel in control and safe like asking questions, washing their hands and staying home with their family
- we are all in this together

Answer your child's questions about coronavirus

Is your child asking you a specific coronavirus related question?

1. Validate: “That’s a good question.”
2. Find out the specific concern: “What makes you ask?” or “Is there something you are worried about?” or “What bugs you the most about this situation?”
3. Find out what your child knows: “What do you know so far? What do you think?” Then you can give them an answer that is age appropriate, depending on their age.

Stick to a routine

Continue to have regular wake up times, mealtimes, and other daily routines as much as possible – predictability and routines help kids feel safe. Many schools are shut down due to coronavirus, and as a result, many parents have to keep their kids at home (while missing work themselves) for an extended period of time.

If you are home with your kids, here is a sample routine for you to try:

| Time | Activities |
|-----------------|--|
| 7:00-8:00 a.m. | wake up, eat breakfast, help with clean up, brush teeth, get dressed, make your bed |
| Morning | outdoor time, academic time, fun learning activity (reading, math/science /languages) creative time (arts/crafts, music, building/construction toys) |
| 12:00-1:00 p.m. | helping with lunch, eat lunch, help with clean up after lunch |
| 1:00-5:00 p.m. | outdoor time, quiet activities, chores |
| 5:00-6:00 p.m. | help with dinner, eat dinner, help with clean up |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 6:00-8:00 p.m. | free time, non-electronic activities such as board games (ideally, recreational screen time (if permitted)) |
| 8:00-8:30 p.m. | bedtime routine, screens off, bath, brush teeth, pajamas |
| 9:00 p.m. | bedtime, reading, quiet activities |

If a schedule doesn't work for you, then consider instead having a daily "checklist" or "To Do's" of key activities you want your kids to get done.

Give more chores

Consider giving your kids more chores and responsibilities than usual, in order to both keep them busy and responsible, as well as to help you out. It's a great time to teach them new life skills! Depending on their age they can help with things like:

- preparing meals
- tidying their room or other areas of the house
- laundry
- taking care of family pets
- dishes

Responsible use of technology

There will eventually be a post-virus period, and you don't want your kids to become too addicted to recreational screens in the meanwhile.

- limit recreational screen time until late afternoon or early evening if possible
- use technology in healthier ways such as for: learning, creating something or connecting with family and friends
- this is also a great opportunity for your kids to learn the art of having a telephone conversation

Expand on hobbies and interests

Your children may complain more often about being bored. Let them be bored, so that they can discover the importance of developing hobbies and interests, whether it is art, music, learning how to juggle, do magic tricks, or learning about a topic in more detail.

Give hope and positive energy

Share positive stories with your kids about how people are coping. Show them examples of ways people are helping others and ask them if they have creative and fun ways to spread kindness and positivity. When you see your children doing something positive, thank them for those positives.

For more information about parenting during COVID

Learn more about activities, parenting, and coping suggestions picked by the experts at CHEO, Visit www.cheo.on.ca/COVID-19.

Need information? Visit cheo.on.ca

Use our handy search tool to find CHEO-approved health resources, clinic information and much, much more!

What can we help you find?



Have you registered for MyChart?

MyChart is a **FREE** secure, online patient portal that connects patients to parts of their CHEO electronic health record, anywhere, at any time.

To apply for MyChart access, visit cheo.on.ca/mychart and fill out the MyChart access request form. Once your application has been approved, we'll send you an email with an activation code and instructions on how to

