



## Anxiety Reduction Strategies for Parents, Children, and Youth

*This information was adapted from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (adaa.org), the American Institute of Stress (stress.org), and the Government of Canada (canada.ca).*

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced many changes that can cause stress. It is normal for parents, children, and youth to feel anxious, scared or confused during this time. Taking care of mental well-being can help to reduce anxiety during the pandemic.

### Monitor and reduce the impact of anxiety

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COVID-19 can be challenging for children to understand, but adults can help them understand their feelings and thoughts. Monitor children and youth for signs of anxiety, such as:

- Difficulty focusing
- Struggling to relax
- Intense emotional reactions
- Changes in eating habits
- Increased noncompliance
- Increased acting out
- Emergence of new or old fears
- Signs of depression
- Increased need to be close

Reduce the impact of anxiety by:

- Asking children and youth how they are feeling
- Listening to concerns and responding in an honest, open and supportive way
- Acknowledging thoughts and feelings
- Letting them know you are available and present
- Correcting misinformation that they may have about COVID-19
- Explaining health and safety measures needed to keep everyone safe
- Reminding them to think of good things that happen every day
- Encouraging positive behaviours (e.g., organizing room, exercising, baking).

### Expect an increase in negative behaviours

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Children and youth may respond to stress by acting out and their misbehaviour is likely to increase frustration for the adults caring for them. This is normal. Take three deep breaths or count to 10 before responding. If you need to, and it is safe to do so, step away and let them know you will be back. Responding in a calm and thoughtful way helps children and youth learn how to manage stress.

### Take media breaks

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Being informed is important, but increased media exposure may increase feelings of anxiety for adults and children. Try reducing time spent browsing for COVID-19 updates or watching the news, and use verified news sources and organizations when you require information and updates.



## Break the worry cycle

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Sometimes, the more we think about the worst that can happen, the more anxious we feel. We can break this cycle by turning our attention to things within our control or helpful distractions. For instance, cleaning out a closet, finishing a level in a favourite game, or talking to a loved one about thoughts and feelings. Create a list of other things to focus on and use it to redirect your attention.

## Keep some routines

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As much as possible, keep usual routines, especially for children and youth, who still need some structure and normalcy in their days. Create consistent but flexible daily routines and habits and include children and youth for ideas. This promotes their sense of control and builds confidence. For instance, set a regular wake up time, get dressed for the day and eat at usual parts of the day. Also, schedule time to go outside, keep up with household chores, and check-in with family and friends.

## Do things together

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Spending quality one-on-one time with children and youth helps them feel loved, secure, and safe. It helps regulate emotions and creates opportunities for sharing thoughts and feelings that might not surface otherwise. For instance, look through family photos or edit photos on a phone/computer, fix something that is broken, organize a messy area, or play a board or card game. Consider learning a new skill like photography, drawing, cooking, woodworking, video editing, dancing, or even chess.

## Take time for self-care

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Parents and caregivers take better care of their children when they take care of themselves too. Set aside time to do the things that are refuelling. Choose one or two activities and practice each day, such as exercising, meditating, reading, or sitting in quiet. This models positive coping strategies to children and youth and helps adults better manage the challenges of parenting.

## Be kind and have hope

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Each person will handle the stress of a global crisis differently. Some adults may lash out, signalling anxiety or fear they may be experiencing. Respond with calm – this expresses hope for the future.

## Ask for help

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No one is in this pandemic alone. If adults, children, or youth are having difficulty managing anxiety, asking for help from a trusted source is important. School resource teachers can access MFNERC clinicians, and community therapists are using virtual platforms, increasing the availability of services.



## Phone numbers:

### Kids Help Phone

- Call [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868) (toll-free) or Text [CONNECT](tel:CONNECT) to 686868
- Available 24 hours a day for young Canadians (aged 5 to 29)
- Confidential and anonymous service from professional counsellors

### Hope for Wellness Help Line

- Call [1-855-242-3310](tel:1-855-242-3310) (toll-free) or connect to the [online chat](https://www.hopeforwellness.ca) at [www.hopeforwellness.ca](https://www.hopeforwellness.ca)
- Available to Canadian Indigenous peoples from experienced and culturally sensitive counsellors
- Available in Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut upon request

### Counselling and Crisis Support

- If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the Canada Suicide Prevention Service at [1-833-456-4566](tel:1-833-456-4566) or the Manitoba Suicide Line at [1-877-435-7170](tel:1-877-435-7170).
- If you need confidential counselling by phone call or chat session, [text WELLNESS to 686868](tel:741741) (for youth) OR [741741](tel:741741) for (adults).
- If you need confidential counselling, crisis and coping support and referrals, call Klinik at 204-786-8686 or Toll-Free: 1-888-322-3019

### Manitoba Domestic Violence Crisis Line

- If you are experiencing domestic or family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, call [1-877-977-0007](tel:1-877-977-0007) or Text [204-792-5302](tel:204-792-5302) or [204-805-6682](tel:204-805-6682)
- Free transport to an emergency shelter is available
- For immediate danger, call 911 or community police

## Websites:

**Youthspace** – An online crisis and emotional support chat without judgement every day from 8 pm until 2 am CST. Chats are confidential and anonymous. Visit [Youthspace.ca](https://youthspace.ca)

**Crisis Services Canada** – A network of distress, crisis, and suicide prevention services. They are committed to supporting any person living in Canada affected by suicide in the most caring and least intrusive manner possible. Visit [crisisservicescanada.ca](https://crisisservicescanada.ca)

**Wellness Together Canada** – Get connected to mental health and substance use support, resources, and counselling with a mental health professional at [www.ca.portal.gs](https://www.ca.portal.gs)

**Canada Youth Network** – For more information on and resources regarding anxiety and COVID-19, visit [www.canyouth.ca/covid19main](https://www.canyouth.ca/covid19main)