



COVID-19 and families

Coping with parental anxiety and depression

Parental anxiety or depression

In Canada, about 1 in 5 young people have a parent who reports a high level of anxiety or depression. In general, the scientific literature indicates that these parents tend to

- **be less available to meet the needs of their children** (e.g. helping with homework, cuddling, cooking, dressing/bathing the child, talking, communicating);
- **teach their children fewer effective strategies** to deal with stressful situations;
- **control or overprotect their children** (e.g. preventing them from going to the park to meet friends or asking incessant questions);
- **have more marital arguments and negative interactions** with their children;
- **find it more difficult to seek social support** and professional help;
- **display facial expressions** that show worry, sadness, despair, etc. that may in turn worry their children;
- **perceive and present events in a pessimistic or catastrophic way** (e.g. believing and saying that things always end badly); and
- **entrust their children with heavy responsibilities** (e.g. confiding in them).

Within the context of COVID-19

The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is causing increased stress, anxiety, and depression in many adults. The fear of contracting the virus or that a loved one will be affected, the repercussions of confinement (isolation, loss of routine, unemployment, etc.), and the excessive media coverage (notably social media) of the crisis are some of the main causes.

Adults with children may face a number of additional challenges: work/family balance while teleworking, prolonged separation from children if custody is entrusted to the other parent, the need to monitor homework, etc.

This period may be particularly difficult for those who tended to be anxious or depressed before the onset of the pandemic. For example, they may now experience more worry, physical discomfort, dark thoughts, difficulty sleeping, or irritability.

Julie is sad and has no energy. For the past week, her two children have been running everywhere and there are toys all over the house. Even getting up in the morning is difficult. She has distressing thoughts, such as imagining that her neighbour, who has COVID-19, could contaminate her even though she has had no recent contact with him.



WHAT ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN?

In the current context, young people can also experience worry, sadness, frustration, etc. Not being able to see their friends or grandparents, not being able to engage in their usual activities, having to adapt to a new lifestyle, and more, can be destabilizing to many.

For those living with a parent experiencing high levels of anxiety or depression, the current environment may be even more difficult to manage. The wellbeing of these children is therefore at risk.

→ To identify the main symptoms of anxiety and depression, and find a list of available help resources, refer to the document produced by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux: <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2019/19-210-14WA.pdf>

Helpful strategies for families

AS A PARENT, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH. YOU CAN ALSO SHARE SOME STRATEGIES WITH YOUR CHILDREN. HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL TO YOU AND/OR YOUR CHILDREN:

TALKING ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

Don't hesitate to

- share your feelings with your partner or call a friend;
- explain to your children that they are not responsible for your feelings and that you have the tools to deal with the sadness or worry you may be experiencing about this situation;
- ask your children how they feel about staying home all the time;
- pay attention to what your child tells you and how they are behaving (e.g. more irritable, trouble sleeping) as their behaviours can be as telling as words;
- remind your child that you are always there if they want to talk about their feelings and concerns. Remember that their feelings and concerns can change over time.

ADD SOME FUN TO THE AGENDA!

- List four simple pleasures you could add to your week (e.g. watching a good movie wrapped in a blanket, dancing, calling a friend).



- Share your own ways of dealing positively with anxiety or depression with your child and encourage them to find their own (e.g. baking their favourite cake, playing a game).
- Writing, being physically active, drawing, painting, or any other activity you enjoy can help you release your emotions.

BE STRONGER TOGETHER

- Maintain close contact with your loved ones by phone, Face Time, or other.
- Encourage your children to write letters to their grand-parents, phone their friends, prepare gifts for people they look forward to seeing, etc.
- Allow your teenagers to stay in touch with their friends via social media.

MAINTAINING HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS

- Getting enough sleep, maintaining a balanced diet, being physically active, and keeping a regular routine are all important.
- Your children may not necessarily understand the importance of maintaining these lifestyle habits when they have to stay home all day. Be sure to explain it to them!
- Limit screen time for you and your kids.

STAY INFORMED - IN SMALL DOSES

- Avoid spending too much time watching the news, especially in the evening before bed. A maximum of one hour a day might be enough, but if you start to feel

sad or anxious after 15 minutes, this may be your personal limit.

- Your child probably has a lot of questions. Don't hesitate to answer them or give them access to information while limiting exposure to news and social networks, depending on their age.

YOU CAN REGAIN A SENSE OF CONTROL!

- By following the recommended action guidelines, you will feel that you are fighting COVID-19 to the best of your abilities.
- Encourage your children to follow these guidelines as well and explain to them that by doing so they are protecting themselves and the whole family.

INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN

→ Comic strip

<http://elisegravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus.jpg>

→ Video produced by CBC

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1717047875867>

→ Stories

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/My%20Hero%20is%20You%2C%20Storybook%20for%20Children%20on%20COVID-19.pdf>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=143&v=8mBWE--TgyQ&feature=emb_logo

CHANGING YOUR VISION OF THINGS

- Set realistic goals (e.g. don't expect to be as efficient at work as you are during "normal" times; tell yourself it's ok to lose patience from time to time).
- Identify five positive aspects of the situation (e.g. having more time to rest, cooking with the family) and discuss these with your children. They probably also perceive positive things, such as having more time to play or chat together, and less need to rush in the morning!

ALLOW YOURSELF SOME TIME TO BREATHE

- Set aside 30 minutes a day just for you. Notify the rest of the family and don't hesitate to put a reminder on your cell phone to "force" yourself to take that time!
- Remember that both children and parents may need time alone. Include these times in the family schedule.

ASKING FOR HELP SHOWS STRENGTH, NOT WEAKNESS

- Don't hesitate to enlist the help of others according to their abilities (e.g. ask the kids to do the dishes, suggest to grandparents that they call once a day for story time or spelling practice).
- Visit one or more self-management sites to help reduce your anxiety or depression (e.g. <https://allermieux.criusmm.net>).
- And finally, if you feel overwhelmed with anxiety or depression, the best option is to seek help. Meeting with a counselling professional online or by phone is possible. See the following resources.



Resources for adults

- **Suicide Action Montreal:** 1 866-APELLE (277-3553)
- **Info-santé:** 811 option 2 (a nurse or social worker will offer assistance and references)
- **211** to find community and social resources
- **Ligne parents:** 1 800-361-5085
- **SOS Violence conjugale** (teens and parents): 1 800-363-9010
- **Réseau Avant de Craquer:** group of organizations that provide services to family and friends of persons with mental illnesses.
 - Phone: **1 855-CRAQUER (272-7837)**
 - Website: avantdecraquer.com (in French)

Resources for youth

- **Suicide Action Montreal** 1 866-APELLE (277-3553)
- **Tel-jeunes**
 - Phone: **1 800-263-2266**
 - Text: **514-600-1002**
 - Website: teljeunes.com
- **Kids Help Phone**
 - Phone: **1 800-668-6868**
 - Text: Text **CONNECT** to **686868**
 - Website: Kidshelphone.ca

Mobile applications and self-management websites

For adults and teenagers:

- **Calm** is an application that helps users with meditation, relaxation, and sleep. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Calm has released free digital offerings.
- **PsyAssistance** is a mobile application aimed at preventing mental illness. It helps with daily and crisis mood manager. It provides a resource directory, a mood journal, exercises to improve wellbeing, and helps establish a security plan in case of crisis.

For children:

- **Rose Buddha Meditations.** On this website, Jean-François Pronovost (Passe-Montagne) tells stories and nursery rhymes, and demonstrates exercises to help children aged 4 to 10 alleviate stress, manage their emotions, develop self-confidence, and sleep.

To obtain the free app:

- 1-Download the Méditations Rose Buddha app on your phone (FREE)
- 2-On the left menu, select «Promo Code»
- 3-Enter the code **OSCAR**

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