

# Surviving COVID-19 Together

HCDSB supports students and families during these difficult days

## Everyone wants to feel safe

We need to reassure our children that you as parents, us as school staff, and the government are all taking precautions to keep everyone as safe as we can during this time of a pandemic.

## How to talk about a pandemic with your child

- The first thing to remember is that you know your child best, so although we can give guidelines, you know how your child will internalize information.
- Always let your child know that they can ask you anything. Creating an environment that is supportive and judgement free is critical for a healthy dialogue.
- Answer your child's questions honestly, while remembering their developmental stage. It is best for your child to hear difficult information from you, rather than from the internet or from overhearing the nightly news.
- Sometimes you may have to explain the same thing a number of different ways. Be patient. Your child may be trying to digest information that is frightening.
- Acknowledge your child's thoughts, feelings and reactions. Social workers call this *validation*.
- Once you know what your child is thinking and feeling, it will help you understand some of the behaviour that you see. For example, a child who is running around at bedtime and refusing to go to bed, may be frightened to be alone. Or a child who becomes very demanding of your attention, and does this in a negative way, may be trying to communicate distress.

- Sometimes we have to look for clues about how a child is feeling.
- Don't let your child watch too much television, especially if there are frightening images.

## Concerning behaviour

This is a list of behaviours that may indicate that your child is feeling distress, concern, worry or anxiety about the pandemic:

- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Increase in emotional outbursts of crying, screaming, or anger
- Intrusive thoughts or worries
- Reoccurring fears about illness or death of themselves or loved ones
- Separation anxiety
- Changes to eating habits
- Listlessness

## Remember: its hard to take care of your child's anxiety if you are anxious too

- A pandemic is an anxiety provoking situation for most people.
- Before you speak to your child about the pandemic, ensure that you feel calm enough to deal with the discussion.
- We can model ways of managing worry for our children:
  - Walking, dancing, skipping
  - Mindfulness
  - Yoga
  - Talking to a friend
  - Drawing, puzzles, crafts, reading, playing an instrument

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## Helping children cope

- Children usually feel safer and more secure when they have routines.
- The continuation of routine during this worrisome time is important, but can be difficult.
- Simple things can make a big difference such as:
  - Keep bedtime the same as it was when they were in school
  - Wake up time should be the same everyday
  - Designated time for school work should be the same everyday
  - Eating meals as a family at the table with no technology allowed
  - Playing board games together instead of watching TV. This can be an excellent time to connect with your kids
  - Exercise every day! Do yoga, go for a walk (keep social distancing), play in the backyard
  - Keep your child connected via telephone or video chat with extended family and friends
  - Give them choices (three choices that you control) they get to choose from

## The scary questions

So what do you do or say when you get the scary questions:

**What if I get sick? What if you (parents) get sick? Will we die?** This is scary because as parents we can't promise that people we love won't get sick or die. What you can say is:

- We are doing everything we can to protect us from getting sick
- If we do get sick we are going to do

everything that we know how to do to get well again

- If we are really sick, there are doctors and nurses who are working hard to make sure that if people do get sick that they can recover and be well again

## People are working hard to keep us safe

- You cannot make unrealistic promises about people's safety from illness during the pandemic.
- But you can let your children know that there are many people who are working to keep them safe such as Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Ford, Medical Officers of Health, the school board, and parents.

## Guiding you to support

- There are people in the community who can help you. In Halton, our first recommendation is that you call [Reach Out Centre for Kids \(ROCK\)](#). ROCK's 24/7 crisis number is: 905-878-9785
- Your family doctor may be able to assist you through their family health team.
- Kids Help Phone: [1-800-668-6868](#)

