



BORDER LAND

SCHOOL DIVISION

Reducing Anxiety

Talking to children about Coronavirus (COVID 19)

- **Be a role model.** Be aware of your own emotional state and self-regulation related to the current situation. Being self-regulated and calm with support students to self-regulate.
- **Be informed.** Get the facts for yourself about the risks from a reliable source. For example, most regions have only a few cases, and most who are infected do not get seriously ill.
- **Don't be afraid to discuss COVID 19.** Not talking about it can be worse; students might worry more if they think you are avoiding talking about it. Use this opportunity to filter the news so children get factual information, not exaggerated or emotional content.
- **Be developmentally appropriate.** Do not share too much information all at once; answer questions honestly and clearly. Invite students to ask questions about things they've heard so you can correct misinformation. Use simple, honest language and check to see how they are processing information.
- **Help children know what to expect.** Use factual information to help them know what to expect at school during the coming week, and what to expect after this week. Use visual aids to help children manage unexpected changes to their routines. A social story (see attached) can provide clear and factual information about what to expect.
- **Let children express how they feel.** Validate fears and do not minimize or be dismissive of emotions. "Name it to tame it." Assure children that they are safe right now and encourage ongoing conversations.
- **Be reassuring.** Children seem to have milder reactions to COVID 19 than adults. Reassure students with the ways they can stay safe and healthy.
- **Stick to routine.** Routines help students be able to predict what is happening and this lessens anxiety. Consistency signals to children that things are fine.
- **Encourage actions to keep themselves safe.** Help children to feel safer by telling them how washing their hands or coughing into their sleeves can help prevent the spread of germs. Try to make handwashing fun by singing a song.
- **Give children ways to be in control.** In situations that seem uncontrollable, children seek control. Give positive ways to be in control, like being in charge of selecting a song to sing when handwashing.
- **Limit exposure to news sources** as it may cause unnecessary stress by having children believe the threat is more serious than it is.
- **Keep open communication.** Encourage students who are worried to share their concerns with adults they trust. Check in from time to time to see how they are feeling.
- **Encourage compassion.** At this challenging time, people may have low levels of patience and need some extra grace.
- **Focus on what we can do to help others.** In and outside of the school, others will need our support to navigate this unusual time. Paradoxically, when we help others, we often find we feel better as well. This is a great time to model being an engaged citizen.

Note the following signs of anxiety

- Refusal to attend school
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or sleeping too much)
- Problems with focus
- Moodiness, irritability, sadness
- Repetitive fears, especially of being separated from parents
- Being easily startled or jumpy
- Behavioural problems that are new or increased
- Frequent physical complaints – headaches, stomachaches
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Less interest in things previously enjoyed, sadness

Strategies to support well-being and mental health

- *Validate reactions:* acknowledge that your thoughts and feelings are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- *Remember you are resilient:* Note the positive ways you have managed stressful situations in the past and draw on these.
- *Stay connected:* Reach out to those who help you in times of stress. These supports will help maintain your positive mental health and wellness.
- *Reduce stressors:* Consider what is essential. Limit negative interactions.
- *Practice self-care:* Emphasize sleep, healthy eating, drinking water, exercise, and rest.