

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE COVID-19

MY CHILD IS WORRIED ABOUT THE PANDEMIC

What can I do to provide support?

Just like adults, children can experience distress in the context of a pandemic, when a disease propagates worldwide. The fact that children may not always understand the information that is out there or interpret it based on their level of development, can cause stress and provoke various kinds of reactions.

Reaction to stress varies from one child to the next and can be influenced by age, level of development, temperament and personality, not to speak of the reactions of others.

How can I recognize signs of stress in my child?

Young children

Young children can react in various ways, given that they will not necessarily have acquired sufficient vocabulary to express what they understand and feel about what is happening. In fact, they most often mirror their parents' stress. In this sense, young children tend to react behaviourally and during daily activities such as mealtime, bedtime, baths, games, etc.

Potential symptoms of distress	What should I do?	
	Children aged 1 to 5 years	Children aged 6 to 11 years
Difficulty sleeping Concerns (asking questions and wanting to be hugged) Physical complaints such as tummy ache Agitated behaviour (challenging what their parents say) Regression (bedwetting) Refusal to go to daycare/school	Remain patient, comfort the child using words that are understood and especially with affectionate gestures. Use play (dolls, drawing, etc.) to facilitate the expression of feelings. Explain the situation in easy-to-understand ways such as: "Coronavirus is a bit like the flu that dad had the other day. To avoid getting sick, you can wash your hands often, just like mom and dad." Instruct your child about hygienic practices.	If your child expresses fear, do not mock but say it is normal to be afraid and that it happens to you too. Use easy-to-understand words such as "Coronavirus is like a big cold; A pandemic is when a lot of people get sick from it at the same time in many countries." Tell your child that there are very simple hygienic ways to protect from coronavirus, like washing hands frequently, coughing into the sleeve, etc. Demonstrate these gestures to teach them. Reassure and explain that you are there for support and will do everything to protect your child. Explain that the government, doctors and scientists are working very hard to ensure that everyone is safe.



Adolescents

Teenagers have their own ways of expressing what is going on. They often act like they are invulnerable and nothing can harm them because they need to feel connected and on top of things. But despite appearances, teens can feel very vulnerable and affected by the situation.

In addition to typical teenage behaviour, adolescents may display uncharacteristic reactions with respect to sleep and appetite or appear to lose interest in friends, school, work or recreational activities. Problems with alcohol and/or drug abuse as well as behavioural disorders may also arise.

Possible symptoms of distress

Worrying about his or her health and the health of family members and friends.

Not appearing concerned and/or minimizing the danger: “Who cares about the pandemic, adults panic for no good reason.”

Having difficulty concentrating, especially with respect to school. Skipping classes.

Refusing to do usual activities and/or see friends.

Having problems with sleep and appetite—eats too little or overeats.

Having headaches and/or stomach aches.

Wanting to consume alcohol and/or drugs.

Being aggressive, irritable, ignoring public health directives.

What should I do?

Be frank and only provide information when asked.

Ensure that the teen understands what is going on and, as much as possible, correct any wrong information.

Avoid pretending that nothing is going on. Do not minimize the seriousness of the situation.

When you are unable to provide answers, admit it. Instead, say that you will get the information and provide answers as soon as possible.

Avoid being moralistic—it doesn't work.

Avoid banning activities that are not related to the context.

Be a model—listen

Your child experiences events through your eyes and needs to be reassured, know that you can be counted on and feel protected by you. You need to stay informed about the situation and take care of yourself in order to remain calm.

Keep to the same routine

Routine and a stable family environment will ensure that your child continues to feel safe. As much as possible, keep to the usual home routine; this will reassure your child. If you are required to remain at home for an extended length of time, plan both family and solo activities. Ask for the opinion of your child, it could be very creative.

Stay informed

Check for information about the COVID-19 pandemic from reliable sources. The Government of Québec website regularly publishes and updates information about the evolving coronavirus situation. Learn more at quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/. However do not allow your child to watch the same TV news reports about the pandemic over and over, and avoid alarmist conversations about deaths, deterioration of the situation, etc. that the children can overhear.

When will I need to seek help?

If despite everything you try to comfort and reassure your children there appears to be no improvement or even persistent and/or intensifying deterioration, you should immediately contact any of the following resources:

- ✓ Government of Québec COVID-19 information line:
1 877 644-4545
- ✓ Your local public health department (Centre intégré/universitaire de santé et de services sociaux—CIUSSS)
- ✓ **Info-Social 811** telephone psychosocial consultation service
- ✓ Government of Canada COVID-19 information line:
1-833-784-4397

Sources :

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Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. (2009). Le stress chez l'enfant de 6 à 12 ans. Québec : gouvernement du Québec. Repéré à https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2009/09-235-12F_03.pdf

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