

## Talking to children about Coronavirus (COVID 19)

During this difficult time, children can easily become misinformed and have anxiety over what they think is happening around them. Here are a few things that you can do to help your child navigate through COVID 19 and any worries they may have.

- **Be a role model.** Be aware of your own anxiety. **Keep calm.** Calm is a superpower.
- **Be informed.** Get the facts for yourself about the risks. For example, Manitoba has 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; children 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.
- **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 children 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 more safe 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, washing off glitter.
- **Keep open communication.** Encourage children who are worried to share their concerns with adults they trust. Check in from time to time to see how they are feeling.

## Note the following signs of anxiety

- 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, stomach-aches
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Less interest in things previously enjoyed, sadness

## Recommend the following 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 spending time with loved ones