

June

INSIDE
▼ *this issue*

03

How to Talk with Your
Child When You Feel
Concerned They May
Be Struggling with a
Mental Health Problem

04

Mental Health During
COVID-19: Signs Your
Child May Need
More Support

07

Parent Role in
Supporting Your Child's
Mental Health

2021

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SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 58

WE MADE IT!! THE SCHOOL YEAR IS COMING TO A CLOSE.

I don't think any of us will forget the 2020-21 school year. The ups the downs, the celebrations the challenges and the need to support our kids has made this year for most, simply exhausting.

But the summer sunshine is here, and school will be over allowing us to focus on getting our kids off the screens and into the park having fun. Smiles and laughter are great medicine for everyone in the family.

This year has been especially hard on our children and mental health issues have soared to never seen levels. The articles in this month's newsletter are to help parents recognize and support their children's mental health. Sometimes, mental health issues may be hard to spot, you may think your child is just a little fussier, quieter, or having unexplained outbursts. In fact, it may be a demonstration of their increasing challenges to cope with all the changes that they have been through during this terrible pandemic.

I hope that the articles included in this newsletter are helpful but encourage any parent who feels their child needs additional support to contact a professional.

For the school council members, it's time to wrap up, take a breath and look forward to things returning to a "new normal" come September. Watch for our special August issue which will be primer for school councils going into the new school year.

I wish every parent, teacher, administrator, education worker and most of all our students the best of summers. Stay well, we are getting there in Ontario!!!

Enjoy your summer!

Theresa Pastore,
Executive Director, Parents Engaged in Education



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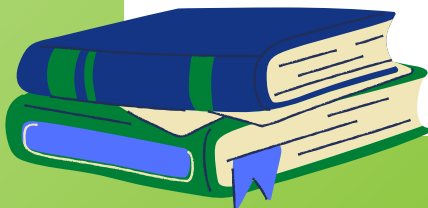
THE FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE IS LOCATED AT
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Our Hours of Operation Are:

Wednesday - 3:30pm to 7pm

Saturday - 10am to 3pm; Sunday - 10am to 3pm

**DUE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, FAMILIES MUST MAKE
AN APPOINTMENT TO COME INTO THE FAMILY SERVICE
CENTRE/EDUCATION BANK BY CALLING: 416-546-1467**



HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR CHILD WHEN YOU FEEL CONCERNED THEY MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH A **MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM**

Source: Ontario Mental Health for Schools

It can be challenging to talk about mental health. Sometimes parents, like others, avoid the conversation because they don't know how to start or they worry that they might put thoughts into their child's head that had not been there, and will, therefore, make things worse. Research tells us that this is not the case. Bringing up worries, concerns, changes in behaviour etc. with your child will open the lines of communication rather than worsen the situation.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH:

- Find a quiet time when you are unlikely to have interruptions to begin the conversation.
- Reassure your child that they can tell you anything and you will not get angry with them (even if you get scared).
- Start the conversation with describing changes you have noticed in their mood, behaviour, reactions etc.e.g., "I have noticed that you seem to be crying more." If you have had conversations with your child's teacher about concerns, include comments from the teacher's observations.
- Share that you "wonder" about how your child might be feeling, what they might be thinking, what they might be worried about etc. e.g., "I wonder if you're feeling sad about losing your friendship with Sam."
- Allow your child time to reflect before they answer.
- Stay calm and don't abandon the conversation if your child responds with "Nothing is wrong.....leave me alone". If this happens, reassure your child that you are there for them. Give your child some time and then try again.
- If your child tells you anything that makes you worried (e.g., thoughts of suicide, overwhelming anxiety, self-injurious behaviour like cutting) reassure your child that you are glad they told you and you will help them find the right professional to talk to, and you will be there for them throughout the journey.



MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19: SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY NEED MORE SUPPORT

Source: [Healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

The stress, fear, grief, isolation and uncertainty created by COVID-19 pandemic can wear anyone down, but many children and teens have had an especially tough time coping emotionally.

As more people get COVID-19 vaccines, there is growing hope that pressures of the pandemic will ease. But the struggles and losses of the past year will likely continue to affect families for some time to come.

Continue to check in with your child often and watch and listen for signs they are struggling. And remember that your pediatrician is here to help.

HOW IS YOUR CHILD COPING DURING COVID-19?

Invite your child to talk about how they are feeling. Feeling depressed, hopeless, anxious, and angry may be signs they could benefit from more support during this difficult time. Keep in mind that adolescents and young adults may try to hide their struggles because of fear, shame, or a sense of responsibility to avoid burdening others. Younger children may not know how to talk about these feelings but may show changes in their behavior or development.

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF STRESS IN YOUR CHILD

Signs of stress and mental health challenges are not the same for every child or teen, but there are some common symptoms.

INFANTS, TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN... may show backward progress in skills and developmental milestones. They may also have increased problems with:

- Fussiness and irritability, startling and crying more easily, and more difficult to console.
- Falling asleep and waking up more during the night.
- Feeding issues such as frantic nipping, more reflux, constipation or loose stools, or new complaints of stomach pain.
- Separation anxiety, seeming more clingy, withdrawn, or hesitant to explore.
- Hitting, frustration, biting, and more frequent or intense tantrums.
- Bedwetting after they're potty trained.
- Urgently expressed needs while seemingly unable to feel satisfied.
- Conflict and aggression or themes like illness or death during play.

OLDER CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS... may show signs of distress with symptoms such as:

- Changes in mood that are not usual for your child, such as ongoing irritability, feelings of hopelessness or rage, and frequent conflicts with friends and family.
- Changes in behavior, such as stepping back from personal relationships. If your ordinarily outgoing teen shows little interest in texting or video chatting with their friends, for example, this might be cause for concern.

- A loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed. Did your music-loving child suddenly stop wanting to practice guitar, for example? Did your aspiring chef lose all interest in cooking and baking?
- A hard time falling or staying asleep, or starting to sleep all the time.
- Changes in appetite, weight or eating patterns, such as never being hungry or eating all the time.
- Problems with memory, thinking, or concentration.
- Less interest in schoolwork and drop in academic effort.
- Changes in appearance, such as lack of basic personal hygiene (within reason, since many are doing slightly less grooming during this time at home).
- An increase in risky or reckless behaviors, such as using drugs or alcohol.
- Thoughts about death or suicide, or talking about it (see “A word about suicide risk,” below).

HOW YOUR PEDIATRICIAN CAN HELP

Staying in touch with your pediatrician is more important than ever during the pandemic. If you have any concerns, ask your pediatrician's office about checking on your child's social and emotional health. This can be especially important for children facing higher rates of illness or risk from COVID-19, such as minorities and those with special health care needs.

Pediatricians can screen for depression and ask about other concerns like anxiety or trouble coping with stress. The doctor may also ask about these symptoms in other family members, as this can impact your child's health, and whether they know anyone who has become sick with COVID-19. It's important to offer your teen some privacy to talk with the pediatrician during the visit to ensure they have the chance to speak as openly as possible.

DEALING WITH THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE TO COVID-19

Children, adolescents, and families who experienced the loss of a loved family member or friend to COVID-19 are at increased risk for mental health challenges and may need special attention and professional counseling to manage their loss and grief. A research letter published in the Journal of

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

Your pediatrician can give you guidance on ways to best support your child and help them build resilience. Some children or adolescents may need more time and space to express their feelings. Some may do better with gradual conversations and other activities besides talking, such as painting or drawing to express themselves and manage stress. Others might be more comfortable with direct conversations or activities. They may need to talk to a trusted adult about how to keep up social connections safely, or their feelings of boredom, loss, and even guilt if they have sometimes not kept up safe physical distancing.

Find more ways to help your child cope with stress and build resilience in Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips to Help Keep the Calm at Home.

A WORD ABOUT SUICIDE RISK

Rates of suicide for both adolescents and adults increase during times of high stress. In addition to screening for depression, your pediatrician can screen for suicide risk.

Remember, not everyone who considers suicide will talk about it, and not everyone who talks about suicide will act on their words. However, any talk about suicide should be taken seriously. If you are worried about your child, it is critical to make your home safe by removing weapons and ammunition from the house and securing medications in a locked cabinet.

Seek help immediately by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or texting the Crisis Text Line by texting 'TALK' to 741741. Reserve 911 for situations where self-harming actions are happening or are about to happen. In a non-crisis situation, talk with your pediatrician about any concerns you have about your child's mental health.

SELF-CARE AND SETTING THE TONE

Parents set the tone in the household. Expressing extreme doom or fear can affect your children. It can be challenging to stay positive, especially if you're struggling with your own stress. But try to stay positive and relay consistent messages that a brighter future lies ahead. It helps to set aside time to take care of yourself when possible, and seek the support you may need for your own mental health. Practicing mindfulness, focusing on the present moment, yoga or stretching can help the entire family build coping skills. Build in down time for the whole family to connect and relax, enjoying a nap, movie time or simply spending time together.

REMEMBER

KEEP LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CHILD, AND DON'T HESITATE TO TALK WITH YOUR PEDIATRICIAN ABOUT WAYS TO HELP MAINTAIN YOUR FAMILY'S MENTAL HEALTH DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME.

PARENT ROLE IN SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is everyone's business, and we all have a role to play. As a parent, guardian, caregiver or family member, you have a particularly special role in supporting child and youth mental health.

Naturally, this begins with supporting your own child(ren) and young family members, to help them to grow into mentally healthy and resilient adults. Understanding the sorts of skills that help to support good mental health in an ongoing way, and how best to reinforce these skills as part of regular family life, can also help to start and keep young people on a good path.

Sometimes, in spite of your best efforts, children and youth will struggle with their emotions, thoughts, or behaviours. Knowing the signs of difficulty and getting help early can make all the difference.

Finally, as a parent, guardian, caregiver or other family member, sometimes the most important thing you can do is to "be there"... walking alongside as your child learns and grows, stumbles and gets back up again. Inspiring hope and modeling resilience.

On the School Mental Health Ontario website, you will find some information and ideas to help you to build and nurture your child's mental health while your child is attending elementary or secondary school.

If you have ideas for additional topics that could be helpful to support parents and family members with their role, please contact us!

PARENT AND FAMILY ROLE IN SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

1. Support social emotional skill development and overall well-being.
2. Know the signs of mental health problems.
3. Help your child to access support if you think professional help is needed.
4. Be there for your child through the ups and downs of life.
5. Take care of your own mental health and model good self-care!

Learn about educators' professional boundaries

The Ontario College of Teachers exists to safeguard students. We also provide teachers with advice to help their daily practice. Our latest advisory focuses on professional boundaries, and includes:

- a list of watch-for behaviours
- a framework for action and self-reflection, and
- pointers to applicable decisions and helpful resources.

Read the advisory and watch our webinar at:

oct.ca/resources/advisories/professional-boundaries



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and families will
get through this
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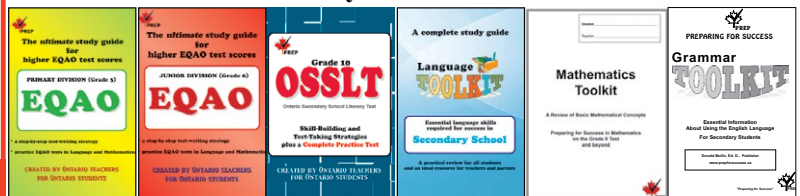


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Parents Engaged in Education is a not-for-profit organization formed by experienced school council members to provide resources and skill building opportunities for parent leaders across the province.

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