Helpful Tips & Information for Families

- Communicating with Your Kids About COVID-19
- Avoiding Germs
- Going Back to School
- Social Distancing
- Coping
- Stress Management
- Wearing Masks
- Getting a Good Night’s Sleep

For more information, contact HCRS at (802) 886-4500
Supporting families since 1967 across Windsor and Windham Counties
www.hcrs.org
The COVID Pandemic is a stressful event. It is new for everyone and each individual is different in how they are feeling and dealing with it. As with any stressful event that can cause anxiety and fear in individuals, it’s important to identify, understand and communicate what and how you are feeling especially as places begin to reopen. Developing healthy ways to manage that stress and anxiety is important as well as accessing effective ways to communicate. Below are some helpful tips in effectively communicating with schools and/or providers.

- Prepare yourself for the conversation by having an open discussion as a family
- Take a deep inventory of your feelings and your child’s
- Write down the concerns and/or fears, worries, etc.
- Practice deep breathing exercises and present the information when calm
- However you present the info-by email, letter, phone or zoom, be sure you communicate effectively leaving out any tones or assumptions.
- Allow the school/provider to address the concerns and hear them out respectively.
- Be mindful to ask what your options are and how an agreement can be made to support both parties.
- Advocate for your child’s needs by utilizing guidance from PCP, therapist, psychiatrist, etc.

Below are some helpful links to utilize to help in coping during the pandemic use this as supports and if you feel your anxiety rising take a break and reset your mind by engaging in a relaxing activity or reaching out to a support person.


Talking to Younger Kids about Germs and the Coronavirus

The old approach of talking to children about bad news or problems was to hide it from so to not scare them. But children are keen at picking up distress around them. If they do not have a trusted grown-up’s explanation, they fill in the blanks with scary thoughts. The best thing teachers and parents can do is find a way to give children information without frightening them and provide them with comfort and support.

Remember - When talking to a child about germs or coronavirus you should:

- Stay calm and speak in a “matter of fact way”
- Be positive and optimistic, the child will mirror your approach
- Be honest and truthful, but use developmentally appropriate language

Facts about Germs

- Germs are everywhere! They are all around us. They are on objects around us, they are in the air, they are even on our bodies right now.
- Germs are unavoidable! You can never avoid ALL germs.
- Germs aren’t all bad! Our bodies have immune systems with little “ninja fighters” that help fight off germs. These little ninja fighters need exercise and practice to be good at what they do, just like we do. Everyday we come into contact with germs, and these germs teach our fighters how to beat those germs. When our fighters practice, they get stronger and smarter. If we don’t allow our fighters to practice, then they don’t know how to fight germs as well. So introducing our fighters to germs isn’t a bad thing.

Staying Safe!
The best way to avoid getting sick, whether it’s a cold, the flu, or coronavirus is to practice good hygiene and avoid others if we are sick. When talking to kids, it is important to emphasize what families, teachers, and communities are doing to protect each other from the coronavirus and other viruses. The more we practice these safety guidelines, the less likely it is that we will get sick or make someone else sick.

- Washing hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds)
- Wearing cloth facial coverings
- Staying at least 6 feet apart (physical distancing)
- Special hours for older people to shop in supermarkets
- Limiting number of people in certain places

Colds vs. Flu vs. Coronavirus

- Most of us have had colds before, right? Colds caused by germs called a virus. Our parents or teachers always tell us to wash our hands, and cover our mouth when we cough or sneeze so we don’t give our cold to a friend. Usually after a few days we start to feel better.

- Sometimes we can get a stronger virus called the flu. The flu can make us feel sicker and it usually lasts longer than a cold, which is why some of us get flu shot from the doctor each year. The flu shot can help us to not get sick.

- Every now and then is a new virus - this new one is called the coronavirus and most of us have never had it before. Because it’s new there is no medicine or vaccine yet, and our little ninja fighters don’t recognize it when it gets into our body and they have a hard time fighting it off. This is why it is making some people very sick. But the doctors and scientists are working on making medicines and shots that will cure us.
Returning to School

It’s very normal for children and young people to experience re-entry anxiety following a pandemic.

It’s ok to not have all the answers. If your child asks a question you can’t answer, or needs help with something you don’t know how to solve, be honest. It’s a great opportunity to do some research and learn something new together.”
– Amanda, Kids Helpline Counselor

Here are some things that can help:

Be curious. Ask open questions and actively listen to understand more about your child’s thoughts and feelings.

Normalize and validate their feelings. This means letting them know that what they are feeling is normal, other people feel the same way and that there is nothing wrong with their feelings.

Limit their exposure to media. If they are younger, this might include reducing their exposure to the news. If they are older, it might be helping them to critically think about media messages they are exposed to or ensuring they are accessing reputable sources.

Create a plan around transitioning. Planning can help alleviate some anxiety, especially fear of the unknown. Having a plan for the first day of school can help.

Take small steps to re-integrate into society. Some fears can be alleviated with small, controlled exposures. For instance, a great first step might be a quick trip to the supermarket, or organizing for your child to meet and hangout with one friend in a park.

Problem-solve any concerns together. A lot of young people have let Kids Helpline know that their main fears revolve around bullying, conflict with friends, or school/study-related stress and this is contributing to their anxiety around going back to ‘normal’. Talking through strategies together (you can use Kids Helpline as a resource if needed for different topics) can help your child improve their problem-solving skills and feel more empowered.

Tips to help transition back to school

• Get back into routine
• Focus on what you can control
• Revisit social distancing rules and good hygiene practices.
• Provide reassurance
• Explore the positives
• Gently check in with your children about how they are coping
• Remember that their emotions will change regularly and show them that that’s okay.

Approach conversations with empathy

Saying that you know they are feeling anxious about coronavirus, but that it’s healthy to talk about our worries and emotions. Children may also get upset or frustrated if they are finding it hard to wear masks, especially when running or playing. You can reassure your children that lots of adults are working hard to keep your family safe, but emphasize that it’s important we all follow the recommended measures to take care of more vulnerable members of our community.
The best thing we can do for one another is be a friend and make sure no one feels socially isolated while socially distancing. We have a few ideas to share with you that make us happy and help us feel connected. We hope you might come up with your own or try some of these!

1. **Schedule regular calls with friends.**
2. **Start a text or email chain with friends about books, videos, movies, or tv. shows.**
3. **Play online games with friends using apps like “words with friends”.**
4. **Tune into live stream concerts together.**
5. **Start a Virtual Book Club with a friend or groups of friends. Read the same book together and then check in to discuss it.**
6. **Plan a time to cook with a friend on Zoom.**
7. **Start watching tv shows or movies with friends at the same time and then check in to discuss them.**
8. **Make postcards and send them to friends.**
9. **Make a friendship bracelet and then mail it to a friend or someone having a hard time being social.**
The best thing we can do for one another is be a friend and make sure no one feels socially isolated while socially distancing. We have a few ideas to share with you that make us happy and help us feel connected. We hope you might come up with your own or try some of these!

- Get your school sports team together and do virtual group workouts.
- Play a game over FaceTime such as Heads Up, Yahtzee, Go Fish, Truth or Dare (you can get creative with this).
- Send your friends voice memos, letting them know what you appreciate most about them. They get to save it and replay it!
- Take turns making dinner with the rest of your family.
- Choreograph a brand new TikTok dance with a friend or group of classmates/or learn one.
- Encourage your younger siblings to reach out to 3-5 people they don't usually connect with, someone who might not have as many people checking in on them, text them and say hi!
Talking about hard feelings...during COVID-19 and beyond

Talk  Listen  Support  Advocate
Reassure  Validate  Empathize

“Tell me about what you’re feeling right now...”

“It’s okay to have strong feelings.”

“Tell me about a time you were worried/anxious/scared.”

“I’m here for you.”

“Our feelings can teach us a lot about ourselves and what we’re going through.”

“What is your body trying to tell you?”

“Talk to me about what’s making you so ____...”

“No one likes to feel hard feelings, but it’s important not to push them down and to have a healthy way to work through them.”
### Diversions
- Write, draw, paint, photography
- Play an instrument, sing, dance, act
- Take a shower or a bath
- Garden
- Take a walk, or go for a drive
- Watch television or a movie
- Watch cute kitten videos on YouTube
- Play a game
- Go shopping
- Clean or organize your environment
- Read

### Social/Interpersonal
- Talk to someone you trust
- Set boundaries and say “no”
- Write a note to someone you care about
- Be assertive
- Use humor
- Spend time with friends and/or family
- Serve someone in need
- Care for or play with a pet
- Role-play challenging situations with others
- Encourage others

### COPING

There are nearly infinite ways to cope, and we all use the methods that suit our unique personalities and needs. An activity that causes stress in one individual might help another person cope.

No matter what you need in a given moment, there is probably at least one activity listed below that will help.

### Physical
- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Get into a good routine
- Eat a little chocolate
- Limit caffeine
- Practice deep/slow breathing

### Spiritual
- Pray or meditate
- Enjoy nature
- Get involved in a worthy causes

### Cognitive
- Make a gratitude list
- Brainstorm solutions
- Lower your expectations of the situation
- Keep an inspirational quote with you
- Be flexible
- Write a list of goals

### Cognitive (continued)
- Act opposite of negative feelings
- Write a list of pros and cons for decisions
- Reward or pamper yourself when successful
- Write a list of strengths
- Accept a challenge with a positive attitude

### Tension Releasers
- Exercise or play sports
- Engage in catharsis (yelling in the bathroom, punching a punching bag)
- Cry
- Laugh

### Limit-Setting
- Drop some involvement
- Prioritize important tasks
- Use assertive communication
- Schedule time for yourself
Stress Management Tips

Keep in mind that stress isn’t a bad thing.
Stress motivates us to work toward solving our problems. Reframing thoughts to view stress as an acceptable emotion, or as a tool, has been found to reduce many of the negative symptoms associated with it. The goal is to manage stress, not to eliminate it.

Talk about your problems, even if they won’t be solved.
Talking about your stressors—even if you don’t solve them—releases hormones in your body that reduce the negative feelings associated with stress. Time spent talking with friends and loved ones is valuable, even when you have a lot on your plate.

Prioritize your responsibilities.
Focus on completing quick tasks first. Having too many “to-dos” can be stressful, even if none of them are very big. Quickly knocking out the small tasks will clear up your mind to focus on larger responsibilities.

Focus on the basics.
Stress can start a harmful cycle where basic needs are neglected, which leads to more stress. Make a point to focus on your basic needs, such as eating well, keeping a healthy sleep schedule, exercising, and other forms of self-care.

Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.
People who are overinvolved in one aspect of their life often struggle to deal with stress when that area is threatened. Balance your time and energy between several areas, such as your career, family, friendships, and personal hobbies.

Set aside time for yourself.
Personal time usually gets moved to the bottom of the list when things get hectic. However, when personal time is neglected, everything else tends to suffer. Set aside time to relax and have fun every day, without interruptions.

Keep things in perspective.
In the heat of the moment, little problems can feel bigger than they are. Take a step back, and think about how important your stressors are in a broader context. Will they matter in a week? In a year? Writing about your stressors will help you develop a healthier perspective.
Mindfulness Exercises for Children

The Feeling Exercise

Collect a number of interesting objects such as feathers, putty, stones, or anything else that might be interesting to hold. Give each child an object, and ask them to spend a minute just noticing what it feels like in their hand. They can feel the texture, if their object is hard or soft, and the shape. Afterwards, ask the children to describe what they felt. With bigger groups, pair children off to take turns completing the exercise together.

The Seeing Game

Ask the children to spend one minute silently looking around the room. Their goal is to find things in the room that they've never noticed. Maybe there are some big things like a poster or a picture, or just little details like cracks in the ceiling or an interesting pattern on the door. After the minute is up ask the kids to share the most interesting new things they noticed.

Ocean Breathing

Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Ask everyone to slowly breathe in through their nose, and then out through their pursed lips (as if they are blowing through a straw). Point out that the slow and steady breathing sounds like ocean waves, gently crashing on shore. Let the children continue breathing and making the ocean sound for one to two minutes.

The Power of Listening

Ring a bell, a wind chime, or anything else that creates a long trailing sound. Ask each child to listen, and silently raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound. After the ringing ends, ask the children to continue listening to any other sounds they can hear for the next minute. When the minute ends, go around the room asking everyone to tell you what sounds they heard.
Mindfulness Exercises for Children

Build a Stress Ball

If you’re feeling brave, and are prepared to clean up a mess, provide the children with balloons, flour, and funnels to build their own stress balls (you may want to double-layer the balloons). Some other filling options include rice, small beads, or the leftover dots from punched paper. Once the kids have built their own stress balls, try using them with The Feeling Exercise.

The Body Squeezing Exercise

Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and ask them to squeeze and relax each of the muscles in their body one-by-one. They should hold each squeeze for about five seconds. After releasing the squeeze, ask the kids to pay attention to how it feels when they relax. Children understand this exercise better if you help them visualize how they can squeeze a particular muscle using imagery, such as the following:

1. Curl your toes tight like you are picking up a pencil with your feet.
2. Tense your legs by pretending like you are standing on your tippy-toes, trying to look over a fence.
3. Suck in your stomach as if you are trying to slide through a narrow opening.
4. Make fists with your hands and pretend like you are trying to squeeze all of the juice out of an orange.
5. Pretend like a bug landed on your nose, and you’re trying to get it off without using your hands. Try to scrunch your face and move your jaw to make it fly away!

The Five Senses Exercise

Take the children outside if the weather is nice, and have them lie silently in the grass. Begin to call out each of the five senses in turn (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch), and ask the children to notice everything they can with that particular sense, until you call out the next one. This exercise can also work well on walks, and in a number of other situations.
Let’s Wear Masks Together: Tip Sheet on Wearing a Mask

Why we wear masks?

It is recommended by the Health Department that cloth face coverings be worn when outside the home to help slow the spread of COVID-19. This recommendation is based on new data about how COVID-19 can spread before a person even has symptoms. A mask helps protect others around you if you are infected and don’t know. A face mask is not a substitute for physically distancing ourselves. You still need to be at least 6 feet away from people even when wearing a mask. Cloth face coverings are NOT surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those types of masks are reserved for health care works and first responders.

Tips to get your child and family to wear masks:

1. Demonstrate using the face mask on a preferred object or person, such as a stuffed animal, a doll, or a family member.

2. Allow the person to choose among different types of fabric face masks to find one that is most comfortable.


4. Plan initial outings in low-demand environments that are quiet and calm, so that the individual can experience success wearing the face mask.

5. Use a printed photo or digital photo of the individual wearing a face mask as a visual cue to wear the mask before outings. The photo can be stored close to the door or on a tablet that is easily accessible.

Here’s a fun visual and print out for wearing a mask: Click Here

We all wear masks to keep ourselves SAFE. Here are some fun videos to share with your family that talk about wearing masks:

“We Wear Masks: A Social Story by Mr. Mike:” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnP-uMn6q_U

“We Wearing a Mask Helps Stop the Spread of Germs:” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL01GNXKmNE
### When is wearing a mask necessary?

| Trips to the grocery store, pharmacy, doctor’s office, or to the office |
| Essential workers at a grocery store, pharmacy, or other business settings where they cannot maintain at least 6 feet distance between themselves and others. |
| At home if you are sick and have other people in the house. |
| Home care workers caring for vulnerable populations. |
| Riding the bus, taxi, or ride share |
| Walking on a busy and crowded street |

### When is wearing a mask NOT necessary?

| Going for a walk in the woods or in your neighborhood. But bring one in case you encounter other people and stop to chat. |
| At home, if everyone in the home isn’t showing symptoms. |
| Going for a run on the bike path, if it’s not too crowded. |

### *Who should NEVER wear a mask?*

- Children under the age of 2
- Anyone who is having trouble breathing or unconscious.
- Anyone who is unable to remove the mask without assistance.

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Resources:


"I’ll protect you, you protect me."
Sleep Hygiene Tip Sheet

What is Sleep Hygiene?
‘Sleep hygiene’ is the term used to describe good sleep habits. Common sleeping problems (such as insomnia) are often caused by bad habits reinforced over years or even decades. You can dramatically improve your sleep quality by making a few minor adjustments to lifestyle and attitude.

Obey your body clock
1. **Get regular.** One of the best ways to train your body to sleep well is to go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Soon this strict routine will help to ‘set’ your body clock and you’ll find yourself getting sleepy at about the same time every night.
2. **Don’t ignore tiredness.** Go to bed when your body tells you it’s ready.
3. **Sleep when sleepy.** Don’t go to bed if you don’t feel tired. You will only reinforce bad habits such as lying awake.
4. **No naps.** It is best to avoid taking naps during the day to make sure you are tired at bedtime. If you must nap, make sure it is no longer than 30 minutes and before 3pm.

Improve your sleeping environment
5. **Your bedroom.** Invest in a mattress that is neither too hard nor too soft, make sure the room is at the right temperature, and ensure the room is dark enough. If you can’t control noise (such as barking dogs or loud neighbours), buy a pair of earplugs.
6. **Bed is for sleeping.** Use your bedroom only for sleeping and intimacy. If you treat your bed like a second lounge room – for watching television or talking to friends on the phone, for example – your mind will associate your bedroom with activity.
7. **No Electronics.** Avoid using iPads, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones 1 hour before bed. The screens emit light that tricks your brain into thinking it is daytime, which stops your body from producing your natural sleep hormones.

Avoid Drugs
8. **Caffeine & nicotine.** It is best to avoid consuming any caffeine (in coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate, and some medications) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These substances act as stimulants and interfere with sleep.
9. **Alcohol.** It is also best to avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts the quality of sleep.

Other Suggestions
10. **Exercise.** Regular exercise is a good idea to help with good sleep, but try not to do strenuous exercise in the 4 hours before bedtime. Morning walks are a great way to start the day feeling refreshed!
11. **Eat right.** A healthy, balanced diet will help you to sleep well, but timing is important. Some people find that a very empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack, but a heavy meal soon before bed can also interrupt sleep.
12. **Warm bath.** Having a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can be useful, as it will raise your body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again.
13. **Relaxation.** Try relaxation exercises. You could consciously relax every part of your body, starting with your toes and working up to your scalp. Or you could think of a restful scene, concentrate on the rhythmic rise and fall of your breathing, or focus on a mantra (repeating a word or phrase constantly).

References:
Centre for Clinical Interventions: www.cci.health.wa.gov.au
National Sleep Foundation USA: https://sleepfoundation.org