

## Mental Health Tips During COVID-19

### **1. I am doing well coping with the added pressure of this event, but I am concerned for the wellbeing of my family. Are there things I should keep in mind?**

While we may focus on our families and their emotions, it is equally important to acknowledge our own feelings. It is normal to feel a range of emotion, from relief at being able to get a break from self-isolating to do essential tasks or report to work, to guilt for not being present for family. Acknowledging the range of our emotions helps us to be more thoughtful and deliberate in our actions to address these feelings. There are several tips available for review on our Government of New Brunswick's COVID-19 webpage that you may find helpful related to parenting.

Although all family members are experiencing stress related to COVID-19, there are unique considerations for youth and young adults. In addition to the general sense of loss felt by all, many youth and young adults are also experiencing emotions related to a decrease in independence, inability to socialize with peers, and disruption to routine.

Here are some things to keep in mind with this age group:

- Teens and young adults may be used to a certain level of privacy and alone time, especially if they would normally have a few hours home alone before parents return from work. With increases in tele-working this may no longer be the reality. Try not to personalize it if your teen or young adult wants to maintain some space.
- Remember too, that they may not be able to/ or have access to usual ways of de-stressing (hanging out with friends, gathering at the lunch table and in halls at school, sports and activities etc.). You may want to consider relaxing the rules a bit as it relates to length of time spent using technology so that they can maintain connections with peers. As it is with you, connecting with friends is an important way to share feelings and decrease isolation and loneliness. While you are at it, remember to commend them for doing their part to keep others from getting sick by respecting public health recommendations.
- Teens may also be going through loss related to rites of passage, monumental events, and uncertainty about future events, some of which are a once in a life-time opportunity (class trips, sports tournaments, competitions, performances, and planning for prom and graduation). Young adults may be grappling with on line learning and disrupted work or they may be worried about their safety if they are deemed essential employees. As a parent, offer empathy, compassion, and validate their feelings of loss, worry, and fear.
- Conversely, some teens and young adults may feel relief at not having to face issues that are a source of stress (e.g. project deadlines, difficult peer dynamics, etc.). It is important to acknowledge these feelings as well.
- Depending on age and maturity, encourage them to seek reputable sources for information and to avoid monitoring news and social media too often, and especially before bed.
- Maintain some routine and engage your teen in helping to problem solve, plan activities, and structure long days. And, remember to acknowledge their efforts. Teens may have skills that are useful for you to learn (this is especially true of technology). Ask for their help. Providing

a sense of control over their day will help to keep them engaged and will help them to feel valued and empowered.

**2. I am not just concerned with my role and that of my colleagues, but I am also very aware of the pressure of friends, family, and colleagues who work directly with patients in hospitals and nursing homes.**

For many reasons, working in health care, whether as an administrator or a practitioner, carries unique pressures. During stressful events, like pandemics, we become acutely aware of the interconnection between the roles and responsibilities of our department and that of the RHA's. Many of us either have health care as our professional background or have formed meaningful relationships with those professionals that we work with to carry out our duties. And, some of us have friends and loved ones who work directly with patients. Therefore, it is normal to be concerned not only about our colleagues in our immediate environment but also those who we know or who we may have never met but are nonetheless an important part of our "team". Early COVID-19 research suggests that this event may cause significant psychological distress on those further from the front line—which would include administrators—as we worry about front line professionals' physical and mental wellbeing. Because of this, it is important to self-monitor for signs of persistent distress and to reach out for support from trusted colleagues, and formal mental health support, when required.

**3. My team has been under a lot of pressure. How can I best support them in their efforts?**

Increased need for communication, pressure for quick response times, and extended work days are some ways that our work is affected by current events. At the same time, we may become aware of increased public scrutiny (we may even be monitoring news reports ourselves) or be sensitive to criticism. It is important to put negative commentaries in context. This can be hard when emotions run high and energy is low. Remember that while constructive feedback can be helpful as it provides an opportunity to improve performance, failing to put this criticism in perspective and to celebrate 'wins' and great effort can have a negative effect on performance. Taking time to acknowledge effort and celebrate success can balance external negative feedback and that internal critical voice.

Employees may fear that they are a burden or are adding extra pressure on colleagues if they ask for assistance or support. We all need to remember that requiring help, especially when faced with increased demands and new experiences, is not a sign of incompetence. Remind yourself and your team that asking for help shows strength. Also, naming our emotions helps us to remember that 'its not all in our heads' and going one step further to discuss emotions with trusted colleagues helps us to feel less isolated.

Humor can be a good outlet for stress. For some, we can feel guilty that we are finding ways to laugh during such a serious time, but evidence suggests that humour is a great stress reliever.

Other tips that can help to reduce psychological overload is to allow increased employee control over work tasks when possible and beef up support (consider a buddy system if you can't manage more

time to do this yourself), especially if you cannot decrease work demands. Remind your team to take regular breaks, and to disconnect after hours, and make sure they do. In this regard, it is important to lead by example. *If this is hard for you, refer to question 4.*

**4. I am having trouble justifying maintaining my own self-care routines during this time. Are there suggestions for making time for healthy habits?**

While it is easy for some to respect healthy personal boundaries and self-care routines, for others this can be more challenging. There are important reasons why we should all make this a priority every day, but especially in times of prolonged stress. Stress exhaustion influences both our mental health and our physical wellbeing.

While some research shows that stress can lead to long term mental ill health, compromised immunity, and may potentially contribute to chronic disease, it's not all bad news. There is evidence that suggests that stress can also help us to stay focused on those things that matter most and can help to catapult us to achieve goals.

So, if you need to rationalize going for that walk or run, or to detach by reading a good book, or watching a mindfulness video or re-runs of your favorite sit com, there is plenty of evidence out there to tell us that this is exactly what we need to be doing— *especially now!* While you are at it, share your strategies with others. Seeing you lead by example gives colleagues permission to do the same.

**5. Where can I get more information or additional support?**

**For more valuable information about how to take care of your emotional health during this stressful time, check out these excellent sources:**

[Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

[Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty](#) – Psychology Tools

[Canadian Mental Health Association of New Brunswick](#) – offering free webinars and other resources on topics related to coping with COVID-19

[Calm](#) - Calm is an award-winning app for Sleep, Meditation and Relaxation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they are offering a range of free resources.

[Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak](#) – World Health Organization

## Mental Health and Crisis Resources

- **Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)** is available 24/7 at [www.myinconfidence.ca](http://www.myinconfidence.ca) or by calling inConfidence toll-free at 1-877-418-2181. Online resources are available via:

[Myinconfidence.ca](http://Myinconfidence.ca)

**Userid: healthymind**

**Password: inconfidence**

- Many resources are available through GNB's Mental Health Toolkit (available on the GNB intranet) including those available through Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, such as the Plan for Resilience.
- **Regional Mental Health Clinics:** Fredericton Addiction and Mental Health Center can be reached at 453-2132. See provincial list below.
- 911 for emergencies
- **CHIMO:** Tel: (800) 667-5005 available 24/7 Live chat: 5pm to 12 am daily
- **Crisis Services Canada** is available across Canada via toll-free phone, chat or text for people thinking about or affected by suicide, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **1-833-456-4566.**
- **Kids Help Phone:** 1-800-668-6868 Available 24/7 including text based, mobile app, and website support
- **Hope for Wellness Indigenous helpline:** 1-855-242-3310

### On line resources for people with substance use disorders:

<https://csam-smca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Online-Resources-of-support-for-people-with-substance-use-disorders.pdf>