

Waves of Emotion When Living in Times of Stress

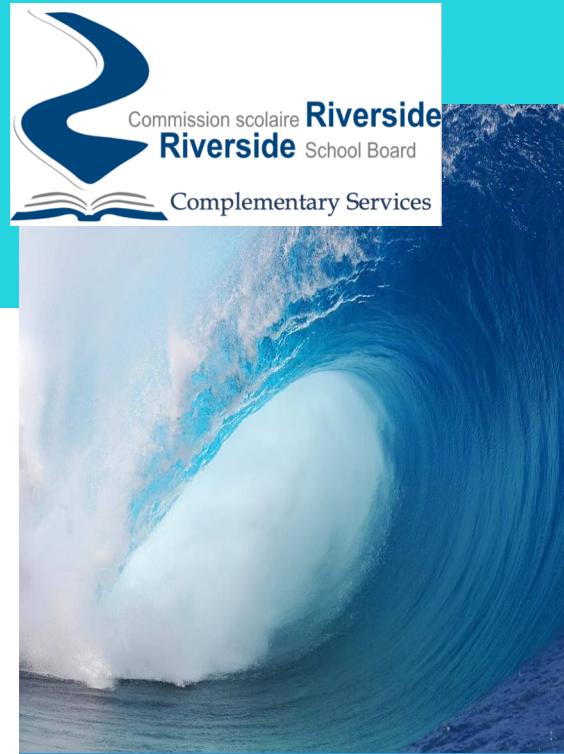
All Children have experienced some instability in their lives linked to COVID-19. Initially when schools closed and once again now that schools are reopening. For some children, these events may have little noticeable impact on their behaviours, for others there will be varying degrees of reactions. These can all be part of a child's common response to the instability around them.

How We Help Our Children Feel Safe

While we cannot completely protect our children from the uncertainty in the world, there are many things that we do to help them feel safe and taken care of.

- Providing them with consistent routines for meals and bed time
- Limiting their exposure to media coverage of the virus and to adult conversations about the virus.
- Avoiding passing on our own worries to our children by staying calm in their presence and by relying on adults in our environment for our own support.
- Limiting screen time during the hour before bed and encouraging calm activities instead to help them get a good night of sleep.
- Answering children's questions in a concise, truthful and reassuring manner.
- Focusing on what we are doing as a family and what the school is doing to keep everyone safe.

Beneath children's reactions and behaviours are a variety of underlying emotions either linked to the virus itself or to the recent changes in their lives that the virus has provoked. Feelings such as confusion, worry, sadness, and fear. Helping children express their feelings will help them to adjust to their new reality.



Have You Noticed Any of These Changes in your Child's Behaviour?

- unfocused/inattentive and lack of perseverance
 - changes in appetite
 - sleep disturbances (e.g. bed wetting, nightmares)
 - temper tantrums, argumentative
 - irritability (e.g., easily annoyed, whining, complaining, muttering)
 - withdrawn (e.g., very quiet, isolate themselves)
 - seems scared or fearful
 - mouthing (toys, clothing, fingers, etc.)
 - fidgeting, pacing
 - pains and aches (headaches, stomachaches)

How Can You Help Your Child Express These Emotions?

Listening and helping children name their emotions (frustration, sadness, anger etc). Responding in an understanding manner and giving importance to their concerns and worries no matter how big or small.

Creative activities, done with a caring adult, such as playing music, painting, pretend playing, dancing, doing crafts, singing, and cooking also allow the expression of emotions. What is important is not the final product but the opportunity for creative expression. These activities can also be a good opportunity to be silly and to spend quality time together.



Physical activities such as biking, running, throwing and walking are all ways for children (and adults!) to release the emotions they are keeping inside. What is important is neither skill development nor competition, but rather physical movement. If you can have fun together and laugh at the same time, all the better!

Calming activities with a caring adult such as colouring, cuddling, reading, spending time outside and doing puzzles are soothing.

Crying is good for children. From preschoolers to teens, regardless of gender, crying is a healthy way to express feelings. As parents, sometimes we need a good cry too!

How Can You Help Your Child Through the Day?

For some children, going back to school after several weeks at home will be more difficult. Help them feel close to home while they are at school.

- Give them something to hold onto (a picture of a caregiver or a pet, a special rock etc.)
- As they leave, talk about what you will do together when you see them after school (e.g. a shared meal, game or activity for them to look forward to).
- Fill something (locket, pocket etc.) with enough love, hugs or kisses to last the day. Make sure to fill up again for the next day!

When Should You Seek Support?

If your child's reactions are persistent (have lasted more than two weeks) or are intense (interfering significantly and frequently with your family life) do not hesitate to seek support. Likewise, if you are overwhelmed by your child's reactions and would like support please contact professional services through the link below.

<https://www.rsbmentalwellnesssupport.com/post/request-for-complementary-services>