

Don't forget about mental health!

Are you feeling stressed, anxious or depressed? The following advice can help you to intelligently deal with events stemming from the coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic here in Québec.

The current coronavirus (COVID-19) and related unprecedented preventive measures are a new reality, one that is not easy to deal with. For some, the measures can make an already difficult situation even more fragile for family, financial and/or social reasons.

While an event of this size can affect your physical health, it can also impair your mental health by causing stress, anxiety or depression. But there are things you can do to improve how you manage these types of reactions.

Most people will succeed in adapting to the situation, but paying attention to your needs remains very important. Don't be afraid to do what is necessary to help yourself.

If you are a close friend or family member of a person with disabilities, pay particular attention to signs of their stress, depression or anxiety if they are unable to clearly express them.

How do these problems manifest themselves?

1 PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Headaches, neck tension, digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Loss of appetite

2 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- Worries and sense of insecurity
- Feeling overwhelmed by events
- Negative view of things or daily events
- Discouragement, sadness or anger

3 BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability, aggression
- Isolation, withdrawal from others
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs and medication

How to succeed in adapting?

Take good care of yourself when you are in preventive isolation. Stay in touch with your close friends and family by telephone or Internet. Pay attention to your feelings and talk about them with someone you trust while yet abiding by social distancing recommendations. Speak with a friend and ask for help when you feel overwhelmed. It isn't a sign of weakness but strength when you do what is necessary to get through it. Physical activity will also help reduce tension.

Give yourself moments of pleasure by listening to music or taking a warm bath: it will lower stress. Counting on your own strengths will help you to surf over the hard times.

What to do when distressed?

When this unusual situation seems never-ending, your emotional reactions can become sharper. For example, you may feel greater fatigue, become overwhelmed by fear, have more trouble accomplishing your daily tasks or fear a greater risk of contagion. Pay attention to these signs of trouble ahead and, as soon as possible, reach out to the resources that are available to help.



Experiencing financial worries?

Increased stress related to financial insecurity can also arise during a pandemic. Loss of employment and income are a major source of anxiety for everyone, but it can become worse when we are in isolation. Many websites exist that offer help, such as the Québec.ca/coronavirus government site. The following website can also provide general assistance: ementalhealth.ca

How to help young children and teenagers manage their worries?

Just like you, children and teenagers can have concerns about the pandemic and the events that are taking place. They can in fact be affected even more because they do not always understand the information they hear or see.

Reactions vary individually, so be attentive to their fears and need to be reassured, and let them use their own words to describe how they feel. Show them that you care. Listen to their worries and give them even more love and attention. If possible, provide opportunities for them to play and relax.



Signs of your child's stress

- Trouble sleeping
- Wants to be held, asks questions
- Physical pain such as tummy ache
- Agitated behaviour, disputing what you say or do

What to do?

- Keep control of your emotions. For example, you might go into the bathroom by yourself to calm down
- Teach your child basic personal hygiene, such as how to wash hands properly
- Reassure and spend more time with your child
- Have your child take part in household preventive tasks
- Maintain your usual habits and schedules or create new ones for safe play and relaxation



Signs of your teenager's stress

- Worries about personal health and the health of close friends and family
- Feels unaffected by the situation or laughs off the danger
- No longer interested in preferred activities
- Has trouble sleeping, appetite issues (eats too much or not enough)
- Wants to drink alcohol and/or take drugs
- Is aggressive, irritable, refuses to obey public health instructions

What to do?

- Ensure that your teenager really understands the situation. Correct any information that is wrong
- Do not minimize the seriousness of the situation
- Avoid moralizing
- If you are uncertain about how to respond, say so. Provide serious answers as soon as you can or suggest calling a telephone support hotline



Managing time at home or when teleworking

- Set aside some time each day for family activities. Play board games, read out loud, go for a walk applying distancing measures, etc.
- Speak with your workmates by phone or chat at nap time
- Suggest your children work just like you by drawing, reading or doing educational activities
- Invite the older children to supervise the younger ones when they play
- Ensure that each parent gives time to the children

Other ways to better manage your stress or anxiety as a family

While obtaining the right information is important, put limits on time spent seeking information about COVID-19. Information overload can raise the stress level, making you more anxious or even depressed.

Use the information you already have to plan what comes next. Set aside specific times for updates once or twice a day.

Avoid sources of sensationalist news and doubtful information. This will help separate fact from rumour. Concentrate on facts to help allay your concerns.

Use reliable resources like the Government of Québec official Québec.ca/coronavirus website.

Resources

For stress, anxiety or depression about the progression of the current epidemic in Québec, call Services Québec at 418 644-4545, 514 644-4545, 450 644-4545, 819 644-4545 or toll free at 1 877 644-4545. The person that answers your call will provide more information and you will be directed to a psychosocial professional who can provide the additional support and advice you need.

Deaf or hard-of-hearing persons call toll free at 1 800 361-9596.

Resources for better management of worry:

- Living better with your child: inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot
- ecolebranchee.com (video that explains COVID-19 to children and why schools are closed, how vaccine is made, etc.) [French]
- carrefour-education.qc.ca (French)
- naitreetgrandir.com (French)

Resources for better management of family time:

- aloprof.qc.ca (French)
- teteamodeler.com (also has ideas for crafts, cooking, nursery rhymes, etc.) [French]
- viedeparents.ca (French)
- vifamagazine.ca (French)

Telephone hotlines for people in psychological distress:

- Regroupement des services d'intervention de crise du Québec: centredecrise.ca/listecentres (French) offers services 24/7 for persons in distress
- Tel-Aide listening centre provides help 24/7 to people suffering from solitude, distress or who need to have someone listen: 514 935-1101
- Écoute entraide is a community organization that supports people who are emotionally suffering: 514 278-2130 or 1 855 EN LIGNE
- Telephone assistance service 1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)

Québec.ca/coronavirus

1 877 644-4545