



# Managing Change and COVID-19 Update: September Toolkit (Digital)



**Homewood**  
Health | Santé



# Table of Contents

Surviving September – Introduction .....	3
Managing Change.....	9
Change and Transition.....	12
Coping with Change – Living with Adult Children .....	14
Your Child’s Transition from Pre-Teen to Adolescence .....	17
From Kids to Retirement.....	19
Keeping Your Love Alive.....	23
Linking Exercise and Nutrition to a Healthy Mind .....	25
Eating Healthier on the Run.....	28
Coping With Loss .....	30
The COVID-19 Pandemic: Managing the Impact (Fall 2021) .....	32
Wellness Together Canada.....	36





# Surviving September – Introduction

September is generally a time for new beginnings; a return to, or starting school, embarking on a new phase of life at college or university, new extracurricular activities, a return to the office or a back to work mentality after summer vacation. Often, those new beginnings come with the stress of new routines, new expectations and sometimes a sense of loss: summer is over and yet another year will soon be ending, or perhaps your child is leaving the nest and you're not ready to see them off.

This year, much like last September, we have additional stressors brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. We may have lost a family member, a friend or colleague to the disease. We've all certainly lost time with our family and friends and lost rites of passage or experiences, such as graduation, prom, vacations and celebrations like weddings, birthdays, retirements or family reunions. For some, COVID-19 meant we could not attend funerals or celebrations of life for those lost, leaving many with no closure or meaningful way to express their sorrow and grief. Additionally, many may have lost their job or business. We're tired and frustrated with living through cycles of lockdown and now we wonder if the COVID-19 vaccine will get us "back to normal" and what the year ahead will look like.

While it's unlikely that the pandemic will be over by the end of 2021, we are expecting a return to some sense

of normalcy as we enter the fall.<sup>1</sup> But just what does this look like? Will we all be vaccinated? What are the unknowns as we head back to workplaces and schools? Will extracurriculars run this year? How can we prioritize our mental health with all of these uncertainties? This article breaks down what we can expect moving into the fall and winter, as well as ways to manage the stress and incorporate some moments of normalcy and routine into our lives once again.

## Vaccinations as a way forward

Vaccinations have been taking place across the country since late December 2020, with much of the country having received at least their first of two vaccinations. While over 54,200,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered as of September 09, 2021, just over 25,900,000 people are fully vaccinated.<sup>2</sup> We know that



after one dose, there is some degree of protection, but much more protection is offered after two doses (e.g., the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines show over 90% effectiveness after two doses<sup>3</sup>).

A real game changer occurred this past May with Health Canada's approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children 12 years of age and older. This will help support the return to "normal life" and will help control the spread of COVID-19 to more vulnerable people in families and communities. Each province and territory has different vaccination roll-out plans, but it's expected that by the end of September, 48 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine alone will have been delivered across Canada.<sup>4</sup>

The shift back and forth between online and in-person school over the past year created a number of difficulties: parents supporting their children's online learning while juggling remote work or scrambling to find childcare, children adapting to new online learning challenges, and for education workers, the stress of keeping children engaged via online platforms was most certainly something they never thought they'd have to do. It was a very stressful year—likely one of the most stressful times we've ever faced in our lives. Summer may have given us a reprieve from these stresses, but as we head into September, the stress may be building up again about what lies ahead for us and our children.

## Will schools be able stay open this year?

It's impossible to make such predictions, but signs point to a more "normal" school year than the past two years, due to increased vaccinations across eligible age groups. Because case numbers vary so much across the country, each region has treated back to school differently this fall.

For example, earlier this year, Ontario announced that schools would offer online learning for the entire 2021-22 school year, as well as in-person learning. Some school boards announced that "hybrid learning" would be offered in the fall to allow for a rapid switch to online learning if necessary. Hybrid learning blends traditional face-to-face learning with the flexibility of asynchronous and synchronous online learning.

In Edmonton, parents chose between in-person or online instruction for their children from September to December, with the expectation that in-person learning will be in place by January 2022.<sup>5</sup> Parents can still opt for online instruction for the entire year if they prefer.

Students missed out on many of the traditional aspects of university and college last year, but 2021/22 is shaping up to have at least a partial return to in-person classes with some campus activities running. In British Columbia, universities and colleges prepared for a full return to campus, while other universities across the country prepared for a combination of virtual, online or in-person learning with many suggesting regular operations by January 2022. Unlike some schools in the US, Canadian universities have not mandated immunization against COVID-19 for in-person attendance.<sup>6</sup>

## Returning to the classroom

Some students, particularly high school students, may have thrived under the online model. A return to the classroom can bring a return of the social anxieties that school can pose. Some students may have anxiety over contracting the virus at school if they're not yet fully vaccinated. Steps to help your child include<sup>7</sup>:

- Working with your child to find out what is causing their anxieties (it's hard to help them, if you don't know what the root causes are).
- Letting their teacher know that your child is dealing with anxiety issues.
- Reassuring your child that you believe in them.
- Helping your child problem solve and develop coping strategies for when their anxiety arises.
- Letting them know that if returning to school is too much, you'll help them to find a solution.
- Seeking professional help early on if you're unsuccessful helping them on your own.

Sending your child off to college or university may seem especially difficult this year. Adopting a 'harm reduction' philosophy may help ease your stress—and your child's too. Campuses won't be free of COVID-19 this year, but by





educating and preparing your child (providing a supply of good quality masks, hand sanitizer, a thermometer, disinfecting wipes) will help reduce their chance of infection.

Education workers faced with teaching in-person and online at the same time, may feel burned out. Traditional lesson designs, instructional approaches, “seat time,” learning outcomes and assessing student achievement are all being challenged with the pandemic. Teaching in a hybrid model will increase the challenges that education workers face this school year. If the pandemic taught us anything, it taught us how important community and connections are. Education workers and parents must continue to communicate, show compassion and check in with each other as the school year progresses. This isn’t easy for anyone and everyone is doing their best in a very difficult time. Remember that we have no idea what is going on in a teacher or parent’s personal life.

## **What about my child’s extracurricular activities?**

Extracurricular sports and clubs may be off the table again this year for students—and parents. Encourage your child to engage in clubs that may still be offered through their school; some may run online after school or during their lunch break.

Consider building in your own “extracurriculars” in your family by cycling, hiking, birdwatching, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, or by practicing soccer, baseball or basketball drills at your local park. Schedule these on your family calendar to help encourage everyone to participate. These activities will help bring some routine into your family’s life and engages everyone in healthy activities, having the added benefit of reducing stress levels.

## **What signs should I watch for in my children and teenagers?**

Stress can be seen with changes in behaviour and physical signs such as<sup>8</sup>:

- Moodiness
- Withdrawing from activities that used to be enjoyed
- Expressing worries
- Complaining about school
- Crying
- Displaying fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent
- Sleep issues (too little, or too much)
- Having stomach aches or headaches

## **What can I do to support my child with the stress of back to school this year?**

Our children have been spending a tremendous amount of time in front of screens with school, social media and perhaps playing online games with friends as a way to stay connected. Being in front of a screen all day is exhausting and reduces time for face-to-face interactions, fresh air and exercise. Following public health guidelines, encourage your child to spend safe, physically distanced time with friends.

Put limits on their screen time, increase exercise by walking or cycling with them, provide healthy and nutritious meals and support your child with a good sleep schedule. Listen to your child’s concerns and recognize that their worries, confusion and anger may be rooted in stress—the same stresses you’re feeling. Seek the support



of a mental health professional to help your child identify the worries they have and develop effective strategies to cope with their feelings.

## **When will we all go back into our offices? Or will we?**

While remote work was possible before the pandemic, it wasn't until COVID-19 hit that there was a shift in the mindset that remote work could be a "normal offering" rather than just a perk. But questions remain—from executives, managers and employees alike—about the benefits of working from home versus working in an office setting.

As workplaces discuss reopening plans, many employees are concerned whether measures to ensure their health and safety will be in place, and expect to work in less densely configured spaces.<sup>9</sup> Uncertainty about the vaccination status of colleagues or if everyone is following guidelines (masking, physical distancing, limiting contact with others) outside of office hours are stressors employees face. Executives and managers must be cognizant of these real and valid fears and be aware that stressed and anxious employees are not productive employees.

Many individuals want their employer to embrace remote work or at least have the option for a hybrid model. 48% of respondents in a recent survey would like to work remotely for part of the time.

Some benefits of remote work include:

- Increased productivity with reduced commuting time.
- Fewer interruptions (meaning more focussed work time).
- Meetings tend to be shorter, freeing up more time.
- Reduced overhead costs.

On the flipside, some employees prefer to go into the office. They may not have an ideal home work space or find the isolation challenging. While remote work can be highly effective, there are a number of challenges:

- Mentoring and coaching can be difficult, especially with younger employees and there may be concern about career growth paths.<sup>10</sup>

- Establishing and maintaining a positive culture is difficult in a virtual setting.
- The line between work and personal life can become blurred.
- Collaboration and innovation can be stalled and knowledge sharing can be challenging (e.g., employees work in silos).

Physical offices are still highly valued by many executives (and many employees too) who see offices as a way to maintain a distinctive culture, improve collaboration, build relationships and provide a meeting place. A well thought out hybrid workplace can be successful when expectations about what is accomplished at home versus the office are clearly communicated. Creating hybrid work schedules and creating permanent remote work for roles that support it may be a way forward for many companies.<sup>11</sup> Workplaces are being reimagined and the best solution for organizations is to remain flexible and balances the needs of the organization, as well as those of the employees.

## **What will socializing look this fall and winter?**

As more and more people are vaccinated, it theoretically means we can start socializing again, but will we all feel comfortable doing so? Choosing who we spend time with and which social outings we can safely consider attending this fall and winter may come with complicated feelings and emotions. Everyone has different comfort or risk levels and, despite the gains we've made, we're not remotely close to a COVID-free world. While we won't necessarily be dropping in unannounced to visit family and friends, we can start thinking about how to safely attend gatherings and slowly expand our small social circle, or bubble. Before making any plans, follow public health guidelines and consider all the risks (exposure, transmission). And then consider:

- Who will be in attendance? Have they been vaccinated?
- How many people will be there?
- Will we be indoors or outdoors?
- How long is the gathering?
- Will masks be required?



Finally, ask yourself if you will feel comfortable attending this sort of event, or will you worry about exposure from people taking masks off, being too close to you or touching things you need to touch?

Even if you're fully vaccinated, you may not want to attend large gatherings. If you decline an invitation, explain that you don't feel comfortable attending. If you choose to attend a gathering, you may not feel comfortable hugging or touching people outside your bubble and may want to continue wearing a mask. When you arrive, say something simple like "I don't feel comfortable touching, but I am so happy to see you!" Be clear and express your discomfort if people aren't respecting your boundaries. You are taking care of your physical health and mental health. If you're not sure how to set boundaries or you feel overwhelmed with the prospect of socializing at all, it may be helpful to speak to a professional.

If you have no concerns about being around other people, be mindful that other people may not have as high a risk tolerance for attending social gatherings, hugging or touching. Respect their decision to decline an invitation, without adding pressure. Respect their choice to wear if a mask if they choose to attend a gathering. Seeing your friends or family members in person after such a long time is more important than whether you agree on the necessity to wear a mask.

## **How can I manage all of these concerns and uncertainties? It all still seems so overwhelming and I am stressed!**

Even though we know we're headed in the right direction and the pandemic will end, we still may be feeling a lot of stress as we head into the fall. Some physical signs of stress include:

- Stomach upset or digestive issues
- Headache
- Muscle tension
- Sleep issues
- Pounding heart or increased heart rate

When feeling stress, we may get into negative thought cycles that are difficult to break. We may feel anxious, sad, overwhelmed or angry, have lack of motivation and be easily distracted. Stress can affect your behaviour and you may find yourself having angry outbursts, over or under-eating, using drugs or alcohol to cope, withdrawing socially and feeling unmotivated to exercise or participate in your usual activities.

There are ways to cope with these uncertainties and manage your stress. First, acknowledge that what we're going through is hard. Really hard. Acknowledge what you (or your children) have lost. Allow yourself to grieve, and begin to shift towards gratitude which can help you feel more positive emotions and help break your negative thought cycles. Try the following to help you reduce your stress:

- Exercise (yoga, walking, hiking, Tai Chi, cycling)
- Take time for yourself to read, daydream or listen to music
- Meditate or practice other relaxation techniques (deep breathing, mindfulness)
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine
- Eat well and drink lots of water
- Get into a good sleep routine
- Say "no" to extra demands while you adjust to new routines
- Talk to friends or family members
- Avoid "doom scrolling" through social media or the news; check the news once a day

If you still find yourself struggling, seek professional help.

### **Help is available for mental health and substance use support.**

In addition to your EFAP program, all Canadians can access resources funded by Health Canada, such as [Wellness Together Canada](#).

**Homewood Health**  
**We're here to help.**



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# Managing Change

It may be difficult to envision the pre-pandemic world and the priorities that previously occupied our time and energy. From personal to professional, pre-pandemic challenges carried differing degrees of significance with varied criteria for prioritization and many elements requiring a focus on change and change management. One common characteristic at both the individual and organizational level that may have strengthened for many during the pandemic was our collective ability to adapt to change.

As individuals and organizations evolve to keep up with global and societal concerns, shifting marketplace demands and workplace upheaval, our primary objectives focused upon safety, and seeking new and more efficient methods, processes and procedures. Overall, the inevitability of change was brought to the forefront of daily activities.

While change can signal exciting new developments, opportunities and learning benefitting the organization and employees, it can also evoke deep feelings of insecurity, confusion, grief and fear. Recognizing and acknowledging these natural responses is important. Adding major changes into environments many already view as emotionally and mentally taxing is something that must be approached compassionately, empathetically and pragmatically for best outcomes. Within the workplace or at home, consciously supporting and guiding through change makes all the difference in whether new protocols,

processes, technology, and roles result in emotional discord and lost productivity or, they may result in positive experiences of personal and professional growth. In all cases where change is imminent, there are steps that could be taken to lay a solid foundation on which to build:

## **Acknowledge that change can be difficult. But stay positive.**

We spend huge portions of our lives working, so it's normal to react strongly and in some instances negatively to changes that may include a loss of co-workers, stability or control. The five-stage Kübler-Ross model of the grieving process (where one moves through denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is sometimes applied to those dealing with personal and organizational change, further validating how profound these feelings can be.



Regardless of position or status, it's important to acknowledge and convey your understanding of the experiences change may bring forward, while maintaining a positive attitude and approach. Change is often positive and typically addresses where improvements are possible and/or needed, yet change may be difficult and you may be apprehensive. Allow yourself to understand the why, and believe in the change that's happening. Maintain enthusiasm through positive reinforcement and encouragement. Congratulate yourself and others where possible on jobs that are done well. Encourage the transfer of unique skills into whatever circumstances, roles or responsibilities may come.

## **Nurture trust with open and honest communication.**

As we progress through change and the pace of adaptation quickens, there may be a loss of key information and understanding. At both personal and professional levels, it's important to keep those close to you and key stakeholders informed. Through open and frequent communication, we can have a significant impact on fostering trust, goodwill and an overall willingness to embrace change. Make efforts to be more available, visible and an attentive and careful listener. Remember, to listen to yourself and reinforce the why and the how. This allows you to convey accurate information during times of confusion and avoids misinformation or misinterpretation.

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Most people aren't fond of change. We like our habits and prefer stability in comparison to the uncertainty and disruptions that often come with change. We prefer to feel secure rather than to feel destabilized. However, we must understand that change is an integral part of life; there's no such thing as a life without change.

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Change has always been part of our lives. From childhood, we've learned to live with the changes happening in our body. We've had to manage varied events, some positive, some not, and we often struggle until we regain our sense

of balance. Many of us don't like instability or uncertainty. We prefer to have a clear idea of where we're going. That's why one of our first reactions to change can be anxiety. Our personal and professional lives are sometimes characterized by periods of instability that we work through until we re-establish our sense of equilibrium.

## **The change process**

The implications of change often begin with the realization that you'll have to move out of your comfort zone.

This is a crucial step as you begin to grieve the loss of comfort, and assume the risks of moving forward into the unknown. This frame of mind helps you to look ahead and actively explore what this change will involve, how it will affect you, what behaviours and habits you'll have to change, and what skills you'll need to call upon and/or develop.

Without necessarily realizing it, exploring the opportunities that change presents and developing adaptive skills and attitudes can help you deal with the change. You gradually find that you've established a new sense of equilibrium or stability, and you begin to feel more comfortable with the change and more competent with new responsibilities.

## **What can you do?**

Some people may adapt quickly to change, while others take more time, depending on the magnitude of the change, the presence of other stressors, and personal coping skills and resiliency. There are however, supportive strategies that can help you adapt more easily to change:

- Don't get overly alarmed. It's normal for change to make you feel uncomfortable, at least for a certain amount of time.
- Try to figure out how the change affects you. Adapting to change requires you to leave behind comfortable old habits and behaviours. It also requires you to make room for new behaviours that you don't necessarily feel you've mastered yet. Take the time to understand what aspects are unsettling, this will help you move forward.



- Ask questions where possible. Confront rumours, and clarify the areas of concern. Be informed and involved, participate and without overstepping, try to influence or support the new direction and/or transformation.
- Review your skills, and be proactive to update or improve them. What skills will you need to deal with this change? What can you do to acquire or improve these skills?
- Talk about your feelings and reactions with people you trust (e.g., a spouse, relative, co-worker or friend). This may be a good time to ask trusted others for their support, advice or expertise.
- Take care of yourself. During this transitional period, it's important to enjoy yourself, maintain connections with friends or family, exercise, and pursue your hobbies. These small steps will help you recharge and perhaps even gain a new perspective on the situation.

## Workplace change

Successful organizations must constantly change to keep their competitive edge. New technologies, new processes, new personnel, new products and new strategies are always being introduced. These changes may be essential, but they're not always easy to deal with.

Organizational changes can be difficult for employees at every level. Concerns about job security, being transferred to less desirable positions, reporting to new managers, needing to learn new technologies or having increased workloads can trigger many reactions, including anxiety, panic, depression, and anger. These reactions are normal and part of how we adapt to change.

## Understanding the process

Change is not always bad. In fact, change can present opportunities that are beneficial to us. As mentioned, during times of change, we often focus on the negative? Because we're dealing with loss, the concepts introduced

by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross surrounding the grieving process are often applied to other issues involving trauma and/or loss, including those associated with organizational change. Therefore, during times of significant workplace change, it's perfectly normal to feel or experience the following:

- Denial: Our first reaction is one of shock and denial. "I don't believe this!" "No way. This can't be happening!"
- Anger: "Why me? It's not fair!" or "It's all because of management. They are to blame!" Reality is setting in and we're reacting to the loss of the status quo and our fear of the unknown. We can be angry at ourselves, with others and those who are close to us.
- Bargaining: "I'll do anything to stay where I am for a few more years." "If my job stays the same I'll never complain about anything again." Anger is getting us nowhere and we're looking at ways to postpone what may be inevitable. We're trying to control a situation that is, essentially, out of our control.
- Depression: "All the years I've devoted to this job were for nothing. Why bother even trying anymore?" "I'm so upset because I'm going to miss my old team so much." During this stage, we're beginning to understand the certainty of the situation. We're moving into acceptance by beginning to mourn the loss of the old way of life.
- Acceptance. "It's going to be alright." "You never know, this may be good for my career." We're ready for what lies ahead.

It's important to note that no one moves through these stages in a neat, linear manner. We occupy different stages at different times and can even move back to stages we have been in before. But eventually we're ready to move forward in our new reality. Finally, remember that nothing stays the same. Future circumstances are sure to change. If you maintain a good attitude and strong performance, you'll keep your options open. You might even find unanticipated benefits!





# Change and Transition

We've previously looked at the application of concepts introduced by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross surrounding the grieving process and how they apply to the change process and other experiences involving trauma and/or loss. In its most basic form, change is the end of something old, and the beginning of something new.

Change is an inevitable fact of life, with the understanding that letting go of the familiar can be challenging. When we understand the need for change, and are resourced to manage it, then we can begin to transition with greater ease.

In order for change to occur or to have been successfully implemented, the following elements need to be present within each participating individual:<sup>1</sup>

- **Awareness** — is there an understanding that change needs to occur?
- **Desire** — is there a desire to participate and support the change?
- **Knowledge** — is there knowledge of how to make the change happen?
- **Ability** — is there an ability to complete or accomplish the tasks required?
- **Reinforcement** — what other resources are available for support on an ongoing basis?



## Transition

Transition is a subjective process. It's the gradual psychological reorientation or alignment that happens inside, as we adapt to change. Transition applies to both personal and professional experiences and generally consists of three distinct phases: Endings; Explorations; and New Beginnings.<sup>2</sup>

- **Endings:**

During this phase, especially when change is not chosen, many may experience emotions ranging from anger to fear as they realize that something they value is coming to an end. The focus is on loss and the experience of grief.

- **Exploration:**

Typically a chaotic period where the past has expired and the new remains uncertain or unfamiliar. This can be a very difficult phase for many as we are often confused, anxious and stressed as we adapt to new protocols, procedures and requirements. This however also lays the framework for new creativity to flourish.

- **New Beginnings:**

It's at this stage that change has been adopted and/or implemented. It's the collective integration of all requirements through effort and hard work resulting with a new norm emerging and being widely accepted. It's where growth is realized and reinforcement through celebration or self-satisfaction and reward is warranted.



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It is important to remember that change is inevitable and constant but you do have choices. It takes patience, perseverance, discipline, and determination. By challenging yourself, you will learn more about yourself and increase your self-confidence as you adapt and transform.

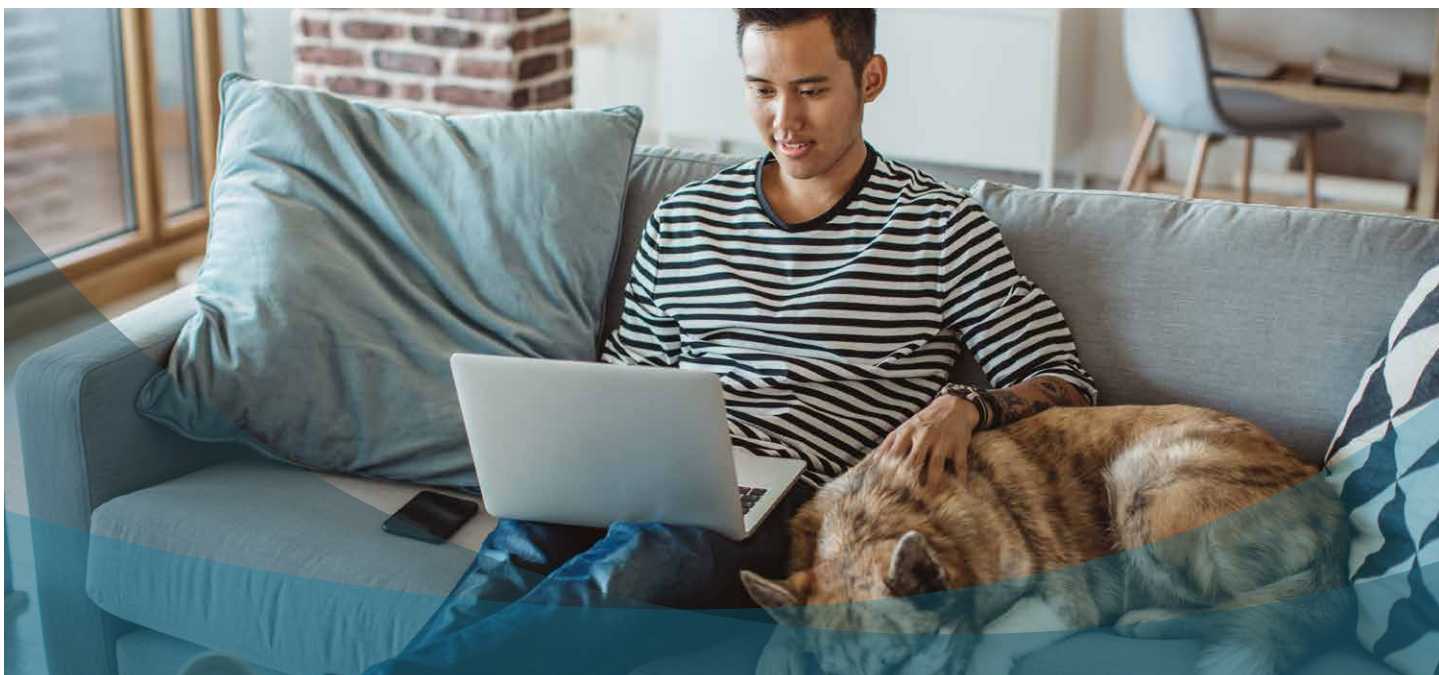
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# Coping with Change – Living with Adult Children

We expect to raise our children and send them on their way when they reach adulthood. Various situations—including the COVID-19 pandemic—can interfere with our expectations, not to mention our children’s plans for their future.

Early in the pandemic, adult children moving home seemed like a temporary solution to job losses or campus closures.<sup>1</sup> For many families, this has turned into a more permanent state and in some instances has created a number of stressors.

With the stress of the pandemic and unknown futures, issues about cleaning or who’s making dinner can be a tipping point. While there may be some difficult conversations and negotiations, having your adult children move home can have rewarding benefits.

## Negotiating tough conversations

### Finances.

Depending on the situation, if for example you or your partner have lost employment, charging your child rent

may be necessary. While it’s ideal if your child offers, you may need to table the suggestion. If they hesitate at the idea, show them your monthly budget to make the situation clear.<sup>2</sup> Options could include:

- A flat rate contributing to your mortgage/rent, food, utilities, etc.,
- Contribution to help cover the costs of food, utilities, etc.,
- A percentage based on their income,
- No rent, but an expectation that they’ll help with household chores or projects.

If you’re able to cover the costs of having your child at home, discuss having them contribute to a savings or investment account to save for their future (e.g., car, rent, house down payment), rather than frivolous spending.



If your child has student debt, encourage them to pay off loans and save where possible. Have open and respectful conversations if issues arise (e.g., your child is spending all their money on clothes, car, electronics).<sup>3</sup>

### Household chores/responsibilities.

Be specific and clear when planning the share of household chores, your expectations and their responsibilities. If your child slips into old habits from their adolescence, try to stay calm. No matter how old your child is, they can still be sensitive to your anger. Use clear statements about how you feel and why their behaviour is problematic.

Be flexible and remember that their schedule may not be in sync with yours (they stay up late studying and rise at noon; while you head to bed at 10pm and rise at 6am). Explain what you expect. Try to use “I” statements and be willing to listen to your child’s responses.<sup>4</sup>

- “I expect that when you make lunch for yourself, that you’ll clean up. When you make a mess and expect me to clean it up, I feel like you don’t appreciate being here.”
- “I wake up when you’re preparing a snack at midnight. Can we work out a plan? I’m not getting enough sleep.”

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Keep in mind that these considerations go both ways—your child likely doesn’t appreciate your early morning rituals or running the vacuum cleaner at 9am. Compromise is key.

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If you do end up having an argument:

- Take a deep breath and try again.
- Take some time away to cool off. Communicate that you need a moment—otherwise they may think you’re walking away from them.
- Acknowledge your part in the argument and that “Everyone’s in a difficult situation and we all need to make an effort to make this work.”



You may need their support caring for younger children or your parents. Through open dialogue, create a schedule that works for everyone. Tell them that you value them and appreciate all that they’re doing to help through this difficult time. Let them know you understand how challenging the situation is for them too.

Don’t take their contributions for granted—as much as you’re making sacrifices, they are too: your child was once independent, making their own decisions and living life on their own terms—moving home likely wasn’t in their plan. While it can be easy to fall back into old family roles, avoid treating your child like a child. However, this doesn’t mean they can do whatever they want or take advantage of you.

### Workspace and internet.

With more people working from home or attending school online, finding a quiet space to work can be challenging, as is internet bandwidth. If possible, avoid overlapping meeting times to avoid connectivity issues and consider upping your bandwidth if that’s an option.<sup>5</sup> Put limits on video streaming (i.e., no watching YouTube, Netflix, Prime, etc.) or downloading large files during work or school hours. If possible, create one or more “quiet work zones,” such as an ergonomic workstation, a quiet nook for reading or the dining table for spreading out. Encourage everyone to use these areas for breaks from working in their room.





## Watch out for everyone's mental health

The pandemic has affected many people's mental health. Your child's life plan has temporarily gone off course. They're isolated from their peers. The transition to online learning was difficult for some.<sup>6</sup> If you're concerned about their mental health (or another family member), check in, offer support by asking what's going on or if there's anything you can do to support them. Seek professional help if your child or other family member seems depressed or are expressing suicidal ideations.

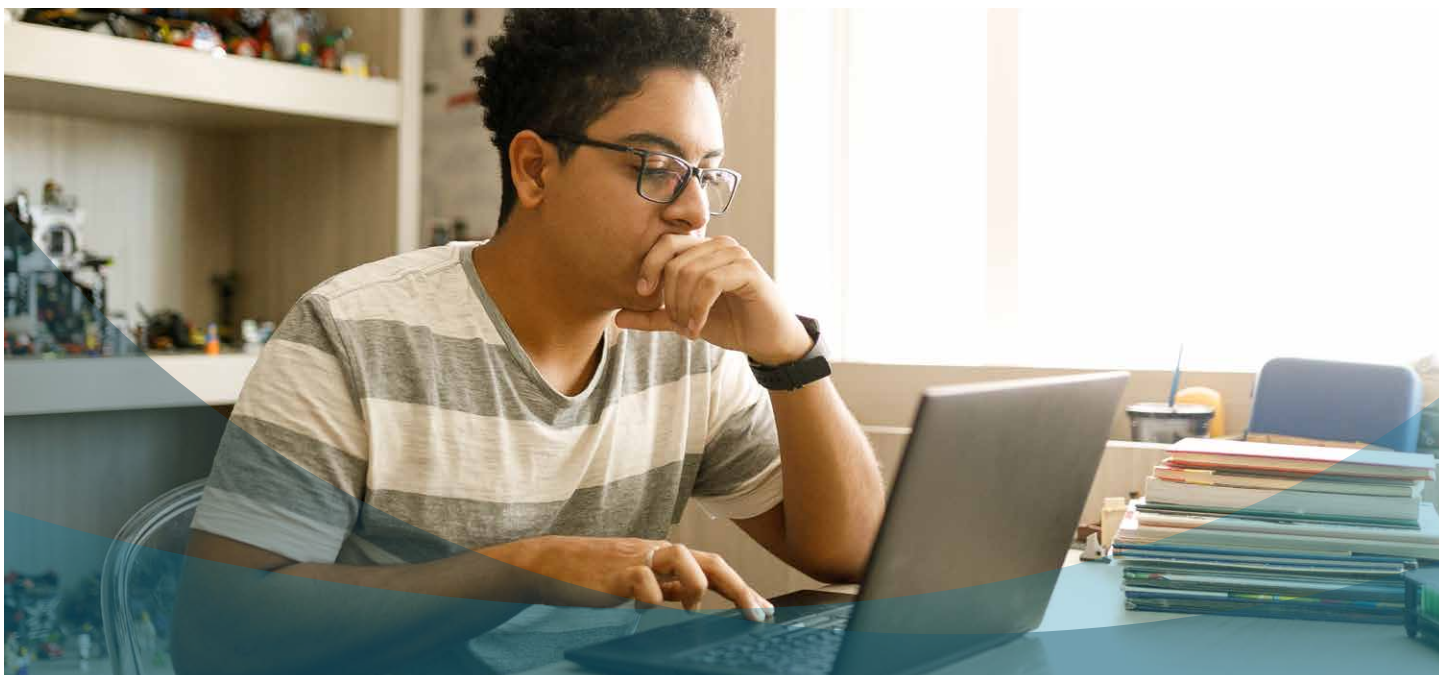
## Focus on the positives!

Try looking at the positive outcomes of having your child move back home. Not everyone has the opportunity to live with their adult child. Look at this as a chance to develop your relationship as adults. Spend time together sharing common interests, activities or projects. This too shall pass, and you will inevitably miss them when they're gone once again.

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- <sup>6</sup> Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic: examining gender differences in stress and mental health among university students. Retrieved on June 7, 2021 from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.650759/full> Your Child's Transition from Pre-Teen to Adolescence





# Your Child's Transition from Pre-Teen to Adolescence

We all know that dealing with a 10 year-old is one thing; dealing with the same child at 14 is something quite different. For their own safety, younger children require discipline or restraints that are neither necessary nor appropriate for adolescents. You don't, for example, have to hold you teenagers hand while crossing the street. And you'd be in big trouble if you tried!

However, treating a 14-year-old as if he or she were an adult doesn't make sense either. Here is some information about teenagers' needs and some strategies that helped other parents and families help their offspring manage the transition from childhood to adolescence.

## A turbulent time for teenagers

Adolescents have to navigate an emotionally and physically turbulent period of transition. As a parent (and a former adolescent yourself) you will understand the need to be sensitive to this process. It is one that will call for some change or readjustment in your relationship to each other. The traditional areas of possible difficulty and/or conflict include schoolwork, household chores, social life, gaming, social media and curfews.

## Choose a collaborative decision-making process

Imposing your standards, no matter how well intentioned, is not likely to work. They will not buy it. A process of collaborative decision-making with your teenager is the key to navigating these tricky waters. For example, many teenagers hold after-school jobs. While these provide needed spending money, they also cut into time available for study and homework. By initiating a discussion on the implications of a prospective after-school job on your teenagers' other commitments, you improve the chances that your child will end up with a reasonable schedule of work, and the empowering knowledge of having made a good decision.



## Ask your teenager for suggestions

Ask your teenager to come up with suggestions when facing a specific issue. For example, “What chores would you like to do in the house?” Then, be prepared to negotiate and to contract. A contract should clearly state expectations and consequences and could be renegotiated on a regular basis. This approach has several advantages. In the first place it shows respect for your teenager’s judgment and intelligence. Second, involving them in the search for a solution helps develop a sense of autonomy and responsibility.

## You can’t make anybody do anything

Adolescents are expert in not going in a direction they feel they are being forced to take. If you try to force them to do something they don’t want to do, chances are they will not do it. It is best to admit this openly. For example, if you say, “I know I can’t force you to do this...” and then go on to explain why you think it should be done, you take the tension out of the situation. Some call this stopping the war. Your teenager sees that you respect his or her power to say no, and you will still be in a position to influence your adolescent’s behaviour in a positive fashion. One way of doing this is by offering guidance.

## Offer choices and guidance

Adolescents are very sensitive to attempts to put them in a position of inferiority. Translation: being told what to do. A suggestion is always better than a direct order. This shows you recognize the adolescent not only has the power, but the necessary judgment, to make a good decision. Your guidance could take the form of an analysis of a specific situation in terms of choices and consequences. For example, “You can take the time to study for your exams and cut back on your social life. On the other hand, if you don’t give yourself enough time to prepare for the exams you may well see your marks go down.”

## Spend time with your teenager

Adolescents need attention. The most valuable way you can give them attention is by spending exclusive time with them on a one-to-one basis. It can be a few minutes in the garage while they are repairing their bike, or going

off together to see a movie. Whatever you do, remember that you don’t have to talk about weighty issues; just have a good time together. And don’t worry if they don’t tell you how much they appreciate this time spent together. Just do it.

## Social media and gaming

Social media and/or gaming is inevitable with teens. Social media and gaming provide teens with a way to create online identities, build social networks and an opportunity for teens to connect with others that share their interests. However, both gaming and social media can have negative effects, such as disrupting sleep, distraction, and exposure to peer pressure and bullying. Social media also exposes your teen to unrealistic views of other people’s lives. Encourage responsible use of social media and “healthy” ways to game. Through discussion and collaboration and offering choices as outlined above, set reasonable limits (and lead by example), monitor your child’s accounts and keep tabs on the types of games your child plays, discuss the risks of social media (unrealistic images), offer alternatives (encourage other activities, face-to-face social interactions with friends, etc.) and discuss how your child uses social media and how it makes them feel. Include discussions about how games and social media are both designed to hook people to go back for more. Play games together with your child to connect, potentially opening the door to other conversations.

## Expect instability

Adolescents are in transition. Mood swings and frequent changes of attitude, behaviour, and opinion, sometimes within days or hours of each other, are all par for the course.

## Persist

Each family situation is unique, so you should personalize the strategies you choose. If one approach doesn’t work, try another one. Being the parent of a teenager may be complicated by factors specific to each situation. Try the approaches we have suggested and observe the consequences. They may help you and your teenager manage this period of transition from childhood to adolescence.





# From Kids to Retirement

The emotional and intellectual stages one passes through from childhood to retirement as a family member are called the family life cycle. Moving through this cycle successfully can facilitate a positive, healthy family dynamic and may help prevent disease and emotional or stress-related disorders<sup>1</sup> which is why it's so important to think ahead and prepare.

## Finances through each stage of life: Costs to keep in mind

A recent survey within the financial industry showed that money is the main cause of stress outside of work. Nearly half of respondents cited money issues as their one stressor.<sup>2</sup>

Your finances will likely play a large role in how you adapt to and enjoy each stage of your family's life cycle. Though everyone's family is unique, certain age groups tend to have similar needs and follow similar financial patterns over time. In general, these patterns adhere to a five-stage progression<sup>3</sup> that can be instrumental in anticipating and preparing for the costs associated with each stage of life.

### Stage 1:

Post-secondary and early career years: The beginnings of real independence often find costs outweigh income as individuals head to college/university, get married and make their first serious purchases.

**Financial priorities:** Paying for school, reducing debt, buying a home, building savings and credit and creating a spending plan.

### Stage 2:

Family and career building years: As people start families, they look to grow their careers and save for their kids' education. Incomes typically go up.

**Financial priorities:** Buying a home, continuing to grow savings, managing increased credit and insurance needs, investing in RRSPs, and writing a will.

### Stage 3:

Pre-retirement years: Those with children may help pay for weddings, education or first homes while continuing to save for retirement and beyond.

**Financial priorities:** Continuing to grow RRSPs and savings, paying off debts, actively planning for retirement, helping children with expenses, reducing taxes.



## Stage 4:

Early retirement years: Some may choose to continue working part-time, but most focus less on work and more on enjoying the things that make them happiest, like volunteerism or travel.

**Financial priorities:** Actively turning savings, RRSPs and pensions into sustainable income, managing taxes, confirming wills and estates are current.

## Stage 5:

Later retirement years. As the possibility of limited mobility and health concerns emerge, thoughts turn to taking care of personal interests while being prepared for unexpected physical challenges.

**Financial priorities:** Optimizing savings and taxes, revisiting estate planning, adjusting insurance plans and considering assisted living options.

Retirement may seem light years away when stepping into your first career, but preparing for these stages, while adding your own distinct priorities (e.g. travelling) and expectations can make all the difference in being mentally prepared and having the ability to reach your goals. Take into account the inevitable emergencies, spontaneous vacations or other expenses that can make or break the bank. Be conscious, pragmatic and realistic when laying out dollar amounts and determining precisely how you'll reach those monetary goals and how long it will take.

Thinking about and carefully planning for your financial cycle will ensure you have the confidence and peace of mind to get the most out of your life, and your money.

## The parent-child relationship: How it will change

The family is as important later in life as during childhood.<sup>4</sup>

Few relationships are as complex as that of parent and child. According to Dr. Steven Mintz, in recent years, parent-child relationships have profoundly changed.<sup>5</sup> The clear, authoritative parenting guidelines adopted by child-rearing experts like Dr. Benjamin Spock have given way to individualized brands of parenting where mom and dad have the final respected say on exactly how

their values and approaches should be imparted on their kids. The variety of parenting philosophies and methods have grown exponentially, but one nearly universal and relatively predictable evolution remains in the world of parent-child relationships: they arrive reliant on you, but learn, grow and become adults moving through the world on their own. This sequence is completely natural, but the emotions that go along with the changes in your relationship can be intense, even unsettling if you're not prepared.

## When they're dependent...

Your little ones rely on you for everything, from that comforting snuggle to healthy meals, setting standards, rules and routines. These create an invaluable sense of consistency and predictability for your child when they need it most.<sup>6</sup> During this time, build up your bonds by enjoying the ordinary, everyday activities like:

- Eating meals together, regularly
- Giving your kids one-on-one time
- Setting aside time for family outings, holidays or special adventures
- Celebrating your child's accomplishments and acknowledging disappointments
- Establishing family traditions and rituals
- Creating routines your kids understand
- Encouraging open, honest communication and modelling it with others
- Starting to assign chores and other household responsibilities

## When they're teens...

"Family is the most important thing to me. They're my own support system. Everybody thinks friends are more important, but they're not. Friends are great, but they'll come and go. Family is always there." -Briana, Teenager (<sup>6</sup>)

They may have grown (and give more eye-rolls than hugs!), but your teen still needs you to help navigate this pivotal time. As their focus moves more intensely toward school, personal relationships, even a first job, your teen's burgeoning sense of identity, independence and exploration of their world can manifest into conflicts



and differences of opinion that can challenge even the strongest bonds. Know this is completely normal as you sustain and continue building your relationship. Try to maintain established family activities, like dinners together, while paying special attention to:

- Communicating with sensitivity and being open to discussing difficult topics like drugs, sex, alcohol, academic difficulties or mental health issues.
- Laying out new house rules, expectations, limits and consequences that often shift with a child's growing independence, while still providing a sense of security and structure.
- Assigning heavier chores and household responsibilities to foster a sense of camaraderie and personal investment in the family home and unit.
- Continuing to show appreciation, encouragement and love through words, actions and affection.
- Acknowledging growing independence and accomplishments.
- Actively including your teen in family decisions, rules and holidays while encouraging them to make good decisions on their own.

## When they're independent...

As your teen fully blossoms into adulthood, so too will your relationship grow into something different and exciting. Typically, parents enjoy caring, meaningful ties with their children and treasure the new, more equal give-and-take relationship. Some may even view their kids as friends.<sup>4</sup> Still, relinquishing some of the control and daily interactions you've had in the past can be difficult. As you redefine your relationship with your adult children, it's often helpful to:

- Consciously be respectful of their space and time.
- Make the time to connect, by phone, video chat or even special dates over food or activities.
- Be prepared to take a step back from decision-making or step up to lend perspective and guidance when asked.
- Share memories. Family stories often take on a new, rich context and more profound meaning when children are older or have families of their own.
- Honour past family traditions, while creating new ones with your adult children and their families.

## As you get older...

"Most surveys find that from one-half to three-fourths of older parents maintain face-to-face contact with their adult children once a week or at least several times a month."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps one of the biggest shifts in your relationship will occur as you become an older adult. Not only is it normal that parenthood may no longer be your primary source of identity,<sup>4</sup> but the need for support from your kids in some of the ways they once leaned on you (i.e., transportation, house chores/repairs, shopping etc.) can start to play into your relationship. When a parent is frail or has challenges with cognitive function, adult children may also have to take on some of the responsibilities usually associated with the parent. Still, Suzanna Smith, associate professor of Human Development at the University of Florida, notes that, "in healthy parent-child relationships, [full] role reversal doesn't take place. The parent is always the parent, the one who taught the child right from wrong, loved him or her, has a history of providing care and a deep understanding of the adult child's personality". As you come into this stage of your relationship, remember that, though you may need to lessen your load or get some added support:

- Your continued love and advice are still valuable and needed.
- You can find new, fulfilling ways to express your support and affection.
- Being an older parent (and even a grandparent!) can be a positive experience.
- The strong bonds you have are ever evolving, deepening and an example to the rest of your family.

## The work-life balance: Staying healthy with work and family

Some fast facts:

- 58% of Canadians report "overload" associated with their many roles (home, work, family etc.)<sup>2</sup>
- Over 50% of employees report that job demands interfere with their personal responsibilities<sup>7</sup>
- 43% of employees say family responsibilities interfere with their work performance.<sup>7</sup>
- The annual costs of absenteeism in Canada due to work/family conflict are approximately \$3.5 billion.<sup>8</sup>



- The number of parents who have a hard time juggling work and family has progressively risen since 1996 and sits between 46% and 61%.<sup>8</sup>

Most parents can relate to feeling torn between time spent at home and at work. Keeping an eye on the physical and mental effects of this constant push-pull of responsibility and preparing strategies to stay healthy and get the most out of your time is crucial in maintaining harmony between your professional and personal life.

## At home

**Get comfortable saying, “no”:** At home and in your community honestly evaluate your non-essential activities. Say “yes”, to the ones that bring you the greatest joy and opt out of the rest.

**Ask for help:** With chores, the kids, carpooling and other obligations where an extra set of hands (or wheels!) are useful, know that, very often, just asking will bring some relief and much welcome help.

**Take care of yourself:** You can’t bring your A-game to work or your family if you’re running on empty. So schedule some “you time”. Relax, take a bath or meditate. And, most importantly, get moving! According to one study, engaging in daily physical activity not only improves your health but is the key to maintaining work-life balance.<sup>7</sup>

**Embrace flexibility:** You may not always be able to make dinner or get to your kid’s recital. Breathe. Learn to let it go. Sometimes, accepting what has happened and going with the flow is the easiest, and ultimately the best, thing for everyone.

**Quality over quantity:** There will be times when your family doesn’t get enough of you. It’s okay. Use the time you do have wisely. Embrace and be completely present with and grateful for those precious moments, even when they’re simple everyday interactions like chatting in the car. Feeling guilty about what you haven’t done only detracts from the quality of the time you do spend with your family. Do your best and know it’s good enough.

## At work

**Know what’s offered and use it.** Research policies, employee assistance programs, benefits and programs that could help you (flexible hours, telecommuting, job sharing). Know how many vacation, sick and family days you have and use them appropriately.

**Set break times.** Short, scheduled breaks during the day provide mental and physical space to reset (and maybe even get in some deep breathing exercises or a healthy snack!) to help power through the day.

**Plan your day and set clear goals** to ensure a sense of purpose and accomplishment come to the end of the day.

**Leave work at work.** When you physically leave the office, mentally leave it too. Unplug from email and other job-related duties at home so you can fully engage and enjoy your family.

Establishing a plan to prepare for the various stages of your family’s life cycle may seem daunting, but with a little foresight, each transition can be easier as you and your loved ones grow and thrive together.

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# Keeping Your Love Alive

When two people first fall in love, their feelings for each other are strong, almost overwhelming. When this emotional rush begins to fade over time, there is still plenty of room for continuing love and affection.

Sometimes, partners in a relationship are disturbed and upset by this natural evolution of their relationship. They feel the magic is gone and the relationship is changed for the worse. Here is some information about the ways loving feelings evolve in a relationship and strategies other couples have found useful to keep the loving feelings in their relationship strong.

## The magic of the early days

The initial emotional rush that comes with falling in love is triggered by the fact the relationship is new as well as the excitement of being in a relationship in which each partner's strong feelings of love and affection are reciprocated. It seems as if the two people literally cannot get enough of each other.

The "magic" of these early days is reinforced by a variety of behaviours by both partners. These could include the way the two people look at or casually touch each other

in public, spontaneous gestures of affection such as a surprise phone call, or an unexpected gift such as flowers, a piece of jewelry, or a surprise weekend getaway.

These behaviours, as psychologists call them, are all rightly seen by both partners as expressions of love and serve to feed the emotional intensity of the early days of a courtship. Anyone who has fallen in love is familiar with these intense feelings that come at the beginning of an intimate relationship.

## The relationship enters a new phase

If the relationship grows and develops the couple may well decide to commit to spending their lives with each other. When this happens their relationship enters a new stage. While their love for each other remains strong, the intense feelings they experienced during their courtship subside somewhat.



## The routine of everyday life

Once a couple set up housekeeping and begin to live together, life usually settles into a routine. In the early days of the relationship, when the couple got together, it was usually a special occasion and both partners were on their best behaviour. Living together, though, allows each partner to see the other through every part of the day, and through the gamut of their reactions to events big and small.

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Everyday life has its special moments. However, everyday life is also going to work, washing the dishes, shopping for groceries, and fixing the leaky faucet in the bathroom.

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Many couples manage the transition to this new reality without any serious problems. Others, however, when they feel the early magic is gone, decide that it was all a big mistake. Maybe they don't love each other after all. Maybe what they thought was love was just a temporary infatuation, and the best thing to do is to call it quits and end the relationship.

## What to do

If your relationship is at this stage, before taking any action, take the time to review your situation. Consider the following:

- It is not realistic to expect the high emotional level of the courtship period to last forever.
- While the early emotional high of the relationship may fade, there is still plenty of room for loving feelings.
- What may have happened is that one or both partners no longer practice the spontaneous loving behaviours of the courtship days. No more little surprise gifts, no more unexpected phone calls at work to say "I'm thinking of you."
- What is realistic is the desire to continue to give and to receive these spontaneous loving attentions that were so important during the courtship.



## Maybe I should look elsewhere

Some people think that the only solution is to try to recapture the "magic" in another relationship. While a new relationship may provide the excitement your present relationship had in its early days, it will last only a short while, and you will be left having to find another exciting beginning.

## Consider changing your behaviours

How you behave affects how you feel. Loving behaviours lead to loving feelings; they do not come out of thin air. By the same token, loving feelings lead to loving behaviours. Few of us are mind readers. Express those feelings of love and affection you have for your partner.

## What worked before will work again

Think back to your courtship and the many ways you showed your love for each other—the spontaneous gestures of affection, the unexpected phone call or small gift, the weekend getaway. What worked before will work again. And there's nothing wrong with trying something new.

Nurturing your loving feelings is a lifetime commitment. Just as a houseplant flourishes if watered regularly, your relationship will grow and develop to the extent it receives the care and attention of both partners.





# Linking Exercise and Nutrition to a Healthy Mind

We have heard it before, eating well and regular exercise are important factors in maintaining a healthy body, but what do those actions mean for your mental health?

Mental health disorder research findings suggest that between ten and thirty percent of adults suffer from mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety. As a result of these disorders becoming more commonly diagnosed, physicians have been looking for natural methods to support their patients in treatment of mental health without medication. What the research is beginning to show is that people who suffer from depression or anxiety may improve their overall mental health through a balanced diet and regular exercise.

## Exercise improves mental health

Physical exercise is increasingly being advocated as a means of maintaining and enhancing positive mental health. Findings suggest that getting twenty to forty minutes of aerobic activity can result in a reduction of anxiety for several hours.

### Exercise tips to improve mind and body:

Getting started can be difficult, so start with small, manageable increments of physical activity and then slowly build to regular, more frequent exercise sessions. Setting exercise goals and being active for one day a week can begin your transformation of mind and body. If physical activity is difficult for you, using distraction methods such as listening to music or working out with a friend can help you develop a regular routine.

### The benefits of jogging:

Aside from the obvious physical health benefits, jogging for 30 minutes can also help with reducing stress, building confidence, improving focus, memory and overall attitude. Jogging once a week begins transforming the mind and body through positive endorphins which can result in one wanting to do it even more.





### **Walking at work:**

Making time to exercise can sometimes be difficult, so why not start with little steps throughout the workday to increase your physical activity. Try parking further from the door, taking the stairs, or having your lunch or meeting on the go. Make yourself accountable by challenging a friend or co-worker to do the same. Give yourself an extra challenge by adding ankle weights, helping to build your muscles and stamina.

### **Make exercise fun:**

Finding out what physical activity you enjoy is important to your journey of increasing physical activity. From gardening, to hiking, to yoga or even a simple walk around the block, there are several ways one can become more active. Tracking activity through fitness apps can help build a routine of physical activity and allow you to continue to challenge yourself.

### **Results of exercise and how it will help you:**

As we have discussed various methods of getting active to improve your mental health, here are some of the health benefits from regular exercise you will begin to experience:

- Improved sleep
- Stress relief
- Improvement in mood and disposition

- Increased energy and stamina
- Reduced fatigue that can impair mental awareness
- Weight reduction
- Reduced cholesterol and improved cardiovascular fitness

When beginning your journey of increasing your physical activity, remember to be patient with yourself; it takes time to get into the habit of exercising regularly. Realize that any small step taken to increase your level of physical activity is better than not doing anything at all.

## **What you eat is what you feel**

Trying to eat healthy when we are feeling low can be challenging, especially since typical comfort foods don't tend to be the most nutritious. We often try to eat well for our physical health, but research suggests that healthy eating also plays a key role in mental health. When we don't eat enough nutrient-rich foods, our body lacks vital vitamins and minerals, often affecting our energy and brain function. When certain nutrients are lacking in the diet, mood disorders, like depression, are more common. So, while it may be tempting to turn to a sweet treat for a mood boost, focusing on nourishing foods is much more likely to give you an emotional lift without the fall.



## Here are a few tips on key nutrients to fuel your mind and body:

### The power of protein:

Protein is often praised for building muscle, but the role of protein goes far beyond the gym. Proteins are made up of amino acids; the precursors of neurotransmitters, which chemically transmit information from one nerve cell to another. Neurotransmitters increase levels of alertness and energy, while certain neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine are especially important for mental health. Protein rich foods contribute to improved cognitive functioning and well-being by increasing the quantity of neurotransmitters available in the brain. Fish, poultry, meat, eggs, nuts, seeds, lentils and beans are excellent sources of protein.

### B vitamins for vitality:

Dark leafy greens such as kale and spinach, citrus fruits, fortified breakfast cereals and beans are rich in Folate, a B vitamin often deficient in people with depressive symptoms. Folate deficiency can cause serotonin levels in the brain to decrease, a key neurotransmitter which regulates our moods and how we feel. Sardines, salmon and eggs are excellent sources of this vitamin.

### Get your omega-3 fatty acids:

Essential fatty acids can alter the composition of nerve cell membranes. In fact, some studies have suggested that 250-500 mg per day of omega 3 fats may reduce symptoms of depression in some individuals, though the evidence is not conclusive. Instead of reaching for supplements, which may not be right for everyone, enjoy omega-3 rich fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, or sardines at least twice a week. And what's even better - these foods are also an excellent source of protein, calcium, and Vitamin D.

### Enrich your diet with magnesium:

Magnesium is required for over 300 separate biochemical pathways, such as the metabolism of energy and the production of protein. This important mineral also activates the enzymes needed for serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine production which, if deficient, can cause symptoms of depression. Food sources for magnesium include nuts and seeds, dark green vegetables such as spinach, whole grains such as brown rice and bran.

### Get a good source of selenium:

Another mineral that can affect mood, selenium plays a key role in thyroid function. A healthy thyroid supports positive mental health which could reduce the risk of depression. Food sources of selenium include Brazil nuts, fish, shrimp, liver and chicken.

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Before making changes to your exercise regimen or diet you should consult with your doctor.

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# Eating Healthier on the Run

A common challenge in sticking to a healthy diet is learning how to eat healthy on the run. Often we're so busy that our good intentions fall to the wayside. Why do many of us find sticking to a healthy diet so difficult? Probably because we're just too busy.

A balanced diet full of fresh vegetables, fruit and grains is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. This is not a novel idea. However, in today's hectic world, most of us are rushing from dawn to dusk and we sometimes choose convenience over health. Maybe we rush to get the kids ready for school, to get to work or to a meeting, to get home, to make dinner and then to get ready for bed. Even weekends are filled with non-stop activity as we scramble to catch up with unfinished office work, finish all those household chores we didn't have time for during the week, spend time with family and friends, or ferry the kids around. So, even though we know what eating healthy is, and why it's important, it's no wonder we have very little time to eat healthy. There just isn't enough time. Many of us forego preparing a healthy, balanced meal for the convenience of the local drive-thru.

The irony is that when our life is hectic, nutrition is even more important. When our bodies are fuelled with good food we have more energy and can better manage

our health and cope with stress. Eating healthy is vital, whether we're on the run or not. Here are some strategies and tips to help you stay focused on healthy eating habits for you and/or your family.

**Eat breakfast.** More than a third of us skip breakfast, and that can be disastrous for our well-being, and ability to concentrate. Eating breakfast kick-starts our metabolism and prevents us from overeating later. It also prevents us from becoming so hungry that we grab whatever we can find (usually sugary or salty foods such as donuts, potato chips or muffins).

**Grab some fruit or eggs.** Make sure you always have bananas, apples or pears on hand and get in the habit of boiling a dozen eggs every weekend. Peel them, put into baggies—either one or two, it's up to you—and put them in the fridge. For those mornings where you don't have time to eat, grab a baggie and a piece of fruit and you have a nutritious breakfast.



**Stock up on healthy snacks.** Create a small “stash” of non-perishable snacks that can be kept in a car glove compartment, school locker or desk drawer. This is readily available food you can snack on or use to round out a meal on the go. Examples of healthy snacks include: dried fruits (raisins, apricots, banana chips), canned fruit or applesauce, whole-grain crackers, mini-boxes of whole-grain cereal, rice cakes with a small container of peanut butter, granola or protein bars, nuts or trail mix, small tins of tuna, cans of soup or vegetarian chili.

**Don't skip lunch.** By eating regularly, you'll help keep your blood-sugar levels stable, help reduce “bad” cholesterol levels and lower your calorie intake. When you don't eat, the resulting dip in blood sugar around 2 PM can make you feel tired, cranky and have you running to the vending machine. If you can't get away from your desk and didn't pack a lunch, dip into your snack stash for some protein, fruit, and carbohydrates.

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One of the most important parts of eating healthy on the run is remembering to drink water, instead of soft drinks or coffee. Because of a lack of water, many of us go through life dehydrated. This dehydration causes fatigue, irritability, and headaches. It's common to mistake thirst for hunger, so staying well hydrated will also help you make healthier food choices.

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Another important part of healthy eating—no matter what your schedule—is planning. It seems odd that we carefully plan other aspects of our lives but not our diet.

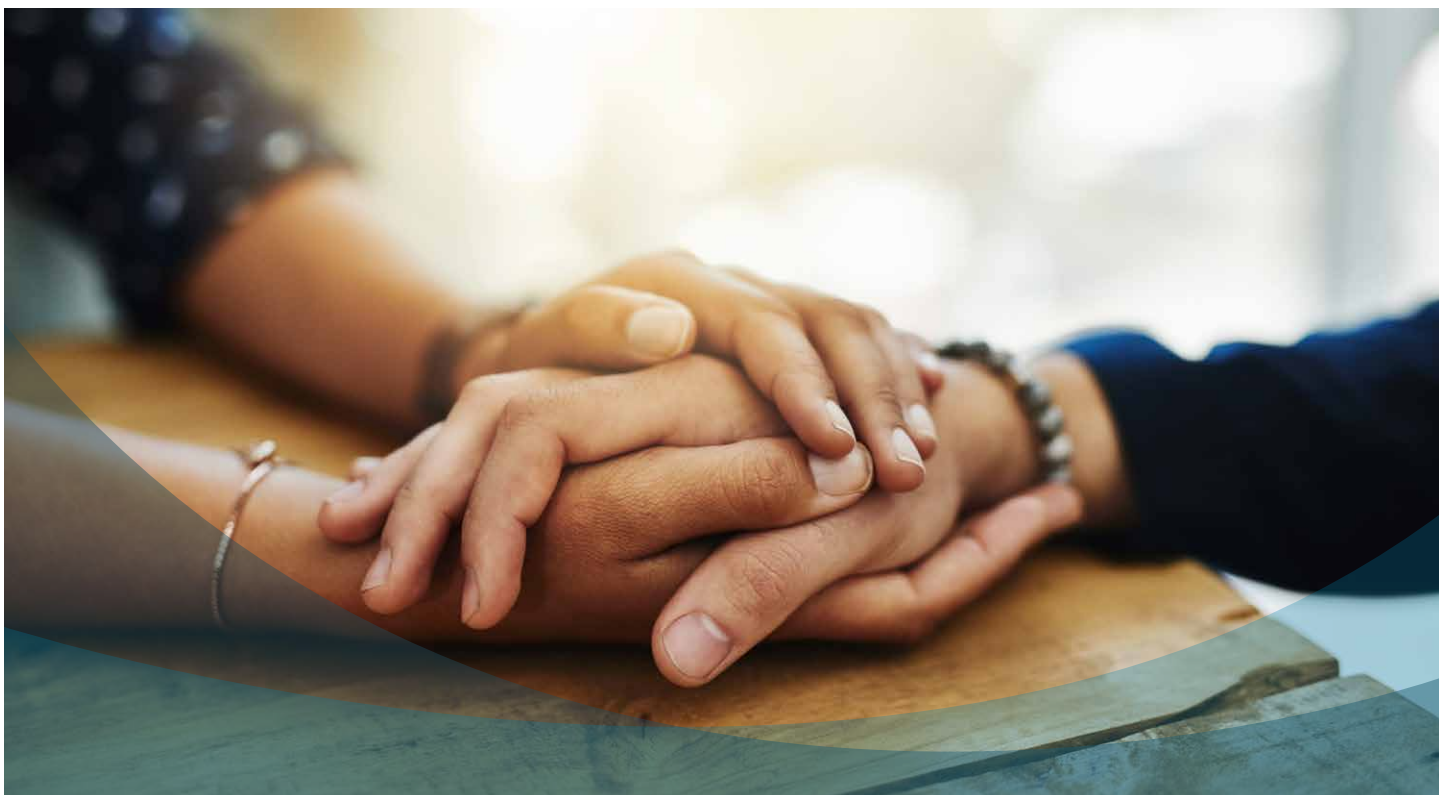
Try planning your meals for the week before going to the grocery store. Also try things like washing and cutting your fruits and vegetables in advance, placing handfuls in baggies and putting them in the fridge for quick snacks or dinner side dishes. If you know you're arriving late from work or school, keep something around that is quick and easy to prepare, and make more than you're going to eat at any one sitting. You can then take the leftovers to work or school the next day.

However, if for whatever reason, you are not able to bring your own food for lunch and must buy a meal, keep the following in mind.

- Consider a supermarket for your fast-food break. You can pick up pre-cut and washed fresh fruit or vegetables, yogurt or low-fat cheese. Many supermarkets also offer sushi, wraps, salads, or other healthy prepared items.
- Chicken or fish aren't always healthy choices. Many fast-food chains offer fried breaded chicken or fish sandwiches on white bread that actually contain more fat and calories than a burger. Grilled chicken is a better option.
- Order a sub or sandwich on whole wheat bread or a wrap. And hold the mayo.
- Order a side salad instead of fries. You'll be less likely to fill up on unhealthy items and the salad will add some fibre and vitamins to your diet.

Eating healthy when you're on the run, commuting or traveling is a challenge. But with a little forethought and planning, you can maintain a healthy lifestyle even when you're on the go. The benefits of healthy eating vastly outweigh the time it takes to prepare a healthy meal, and once you understand this, you're well on your way to living healthier.





# Coping With Loss

Loss is an inevitable part of life. During our lifetime we will undoubtedly experience a variety of types of loss, including death of a loved one or a beloved pet, the loss of health, a job, financial security, a cherished dream, or a relationship breakup. With loss comes grief, and the more significant the loss, the greater the emotional impact.

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Grieving is a very personal and highly individual experience, and some types of loss are much more painful and intense than other types.

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Understand what grief is. After a significant loss, you may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising emotions such as shock, anger, and guilt. Five widely acknowledged stages of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, it is important to appreciate that not everyone goes through all these stages and that everyone grieves differently. There is no 'normal' timetable for grieving. Grief can feel like an emotional roller-coaster ride with the intensity likely to ebb and flow.

## **Get support.**

The most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't generally comfortable talking about feelings, it's important to express them when you are grieving. Find people who can be empathetic and accept what is going on with you. If your grief feels like too much to bear, an experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions.

## **Grieve.**

In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain and allow yourself the opportunity to grieve. Unresolved grief can lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems. Exploring your feelings and thoughts through writing, painting, music, or



other forms of creative expression can be a powerful way to help heal. And remember, crying is a natural way to help release the hurt.

### **Take care of yourself.**

The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. It helps to feel better emotionally if you feel better physically. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Avoid the use of alcohol or other substances that numb your pain.

### **Allow time.**

Time does heal, but how long that healing will take varies from person to person. Give yourself time before making any major life decisions. Plan ahead for “grief triggers” such as anniversaries or special holidays and be prepared for an emotional wallop which is completely normal.

### **Make a change**

When a friend or co-worker is experiencing loss and grief it is understandable to feel awkward and unsure of what is appropriate to say or do. If you are one of these people and would like to be better able to support people dealing with grief, here are a few suggestions:

- Accept and acknowledge all feelings, and let the grieving person know it is okay to cry in front of you.
- Don't say you understand, even if you have gone through something similar, as everyone's experience of grief is different.
- Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss.
- Be willing to sit in silence if the person doesn't feel like talking.
- Avoid telling them to be strong – people dealing with grief can feel very vulnerable.
- Write a personal note expressing your compassion.
- Don't give unsolicited advice.
- Ask what you can do.
- Continue your support after the initial shock has worn off.
- Encourage the grieving person to seek professional help if you see signs of a long-term problem developing.





# The COVID-19 Pandemic: Managing the Impact (Fall 2021)

**You have been given this handout as an aide to support yourself, other employees and family members due to the continuing concerns and questions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Throughout the summer months, governments, health officials and individuals like yourself have continued to manage varying stages of re-opening with updated guidelines and protocols as vaccine efforts continue the fight against further spread of COVID-19 and multiple variants dependent upon location.

As we enter a new season and for many a return to pre-COVID-19 routines including in-person schooling and the return to physical workplaces, you may have questions or experience apprehension surrounding public spaces and your risk of potential infection. Where concern exists, it's important to recognize the efforts put forth by employers and the measures enacted by governments and public health authorities to bring us to a stage where occupation of commonly shared spaces is permissible and encouraged.

As information surrounding variants and vaccines may cause confusion, it's normal during times of uncertainty to experience continued or amplified difficulty with mental health, anxiety and depression. Reactions may vary from worry to fear. In some instances you may experience any of the following:

## **Possible reactions**

When we are uncertain about the health and safety of ourselves and those we care about, we experience a range of reactions varying in degrees of intensity. We all react



differently, yet we may experience common reactions including but not limited to:

- Emotional reactions. Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, and uncertainty.
- Mental reactions. Disbelief related to the extent and duration of the pandemic, loss of concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness and fearful thoughts related to travel and media coverage.
- Physical reactions. Numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, persistent heart palpitations, fatigue, nausea, and gastrointestinal problems.
- Behavioural reactions. Excessive vigilance, withdrawal or isolation, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, and increased consumption of alcohol or medication as a coping mechanism.

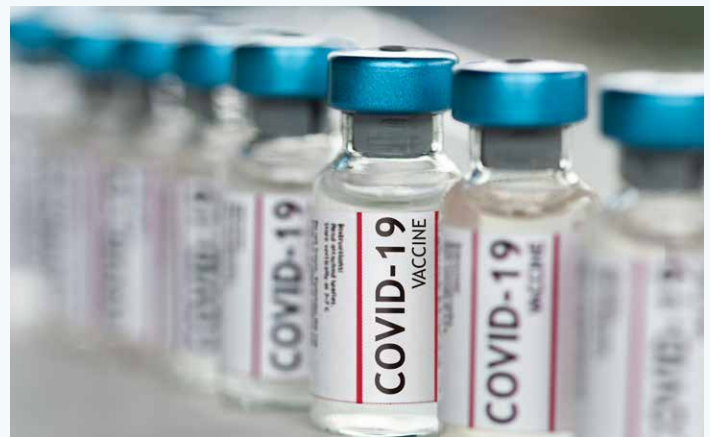
## Evolving challenges and new norms

The pandemic has impacted life at every level. From individuals and organizations to public health and government bodies at both regional and federal levels, we have endured throughout and will continue to face challenges as restrictions are eased including social and travel as borders are re-opened. Before travelling, it's recommended to review what restrictions are in place and whether isolation or quarantine may be required based on jurisdiction and vaccine status. Within the workplace, employers may face additional obstacles as employees reacclimatize to onsite workplaces and may request continuing or new forms of support as the pandemic continues.

As we progress, it's important to remind yourself that continuing precautions and safety practices are essential in managing the risk of infection – including adoption and adherence to revised distancing guidelines, social gathering restrictions and mandatory mask mandates where applicable.

## Fatigue, isolation and loneliness

Through vaccination efforts the gradual transition to limited or no restrictions has progressed well. However, in some circumstances self-isolation and physical distancing have remained as necessary realities. Many have sacrificed milestone celebrations, traditions and the ability to express remorse and/or support when faced with



unfortunate loss, these circumstances may lead to the psychological effects of fatigue, isolation and loneliness.

For those who have transitioned to working remotely, being unable to partake in face to face meetings, as well as having limited social interactions with colleagues may leave many feeling isolated. Additionally, essential workers and those who have continued working onsite faced new physical environments with limited opportunities for interaction. Combined with safety measures, these circumstances have all contributed to growing feelings of isolation.

Everyone will experience loneliness differently, it is a personal experience. Those not accustomed to extended periods of time away from others, or those who covet social interactions may experience extreme feelings of loneliness. Regardless of your position, all feelings are valid. Remember you are not the only one feeling this way. Now more than ever, there is less reason to feel any shame or apprehension about loneliness.

## Vaccine anxiety

Rumours about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines have been circulating on social media for months and with some vaccines making headlines over potential risks, public anxiety about receiving COVID-19 vaccines—or vaccine hesitancy—has been expressed.

The question of mixing COVID-19 vaccines has caused additional confusion and concern for many. Leading health authorities have indicated the process is likely safe and effective, noting a slightly higher likelihood of temporary side effects including aches and chills may be experienced as mixing vaccines often produces a stronger immune response. If you have concerns, speak to your primary care



provider or a free local health resource for guidance based on your individual health condition.

The speed at which COVID-19 vaccines were developed has also created apprehension as some have questioned whether vaccine development was rushed and if safety may have been compromised. These worries can create skepticism which may affect your decision about receiving a vaccine. These concerns are natural. However, it is important to look to the science and facts, rather than to follow gossip and “fake news” on social media. The risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19 far outweighs risks from vaccines. Across the globe, millions have received at least one dose of a vaccine at the time that this article was written.

With all vaccines—as with all medications—there’s a chance for serious side effects, including allergic reactions, but these are rare. Again, speak to your healthcare professional before you receive a vaccine if you have serious allergies or known allergies to ingredients in the vaccines.

## Managing stress and anxiety

Anxiety is highly common and is often triggered by specific events, trauma or stressful scenarios creating challenges in our daily activities and interactions. Stress results from normal reactions, where adjustments or a response is required, causing our mind and bodies to react with physical, mental or emotional actions.

People who may respond more strongly to stress and/or anxiety include elderly populations, people with chronic diseases and front-line or essential service workers including but not limited to:

- Physicians, nurses, and health care providers
- First responders, workers who interact with the general public; and
- Persons with mental health and/or addiction disorders including substance abuse

We all react differently to stressful situations. Given our diverse backgrounds and the communities we live in, our beliefs and behaviours may vary.

What can you do to stay calm during this period of uncertainty?

- Be aware of your mental health. Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions rather than the event itself.
- Reach out to your support system via text, telephone or through virtual conferencing.
- Create a daily routine. Establish a schedule and keep up with daily hygiene, chores and cleaning practices.
- Don’t judge or blame yourself. Don’t criticize yourself for having these reactions.
- Avoid saturation. Manage your media and online intake and try and focus on something else.
- Find something to help distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy with hobbies, routine chores or physical exercise.
- Take time to rest and relax. Maintain good sleep habits, take time for yourself and practice taking deep breaths, or meditation.

## Cumulative stress and building resiliency

The duration and complexity of the pandemic combined with changing protocols and guidelines at both professional and personal levels brings new and unique challenges. The impact you feel and experience may be a result of cumulative stress.

Cumulative stress has been defined as a common experience for people who work in chronically stressful situations. It results from an accumulation of various stress factors such as heavy workload, poor communications, multiple frustrations, coping with situations in which you feel powerless, and the inability to rest or relax. Prolonged and negative stress stimulates the level of stress hormones that can impact your emotions, your thoughts and even your physiological responses. Experiencing cumulative stress for a prolonged duration of time can have a nagging effect on your well-being impacting everything from decision making to your immune system.

Resilience is an important quality in today’s evolving COVID-19 landscape. Resiliency is the ability to face life’s challenges, cope with disruptive change and catastrophe and the ability to rebound from setbacks without acting or responding in dysfunctional ways.



We benefit from resiliency in many ways, including how to endure tough times and become stronger individuals.

While some seem to be naturally resilient, many of us have to build our resilience. Try the following:

- Create a support system. Having a network with whom you can share feelings, discuss problems and receive advice is an essential part of weathering life's ups and downs.
- Be an optimist. Try to see the positive in every situation and remain hopeful and excited about what life has to offer. Negativity is contagious, try to surround yourself with positive people and relationships.
- Accept change. We can't fight change. It's part of life. It may be disruptive, but if you adapt rather than resist, you'll feel happier and less stressed. Resilience involves finding creative solutions to adverse situations and remaining calm in times of turmoil.
- Learn from failure. Use setbacks to develop better coping, problem solving or people skills. Be willing to take risks and learn from your experiences. Construct a list of what you did right, and areas for improvement.
- Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your mental, physical and emotional health. Look after your well-being, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, adopt positive reinforcement and thinking, and find time to do things you enjoy.

## Should I stay home from work?

If you're feeling ill, unwell or concerned, the best thing to do is speak to your manager, HR or occupational health and safety department within your organization. They're there to help.

## Where can I get more information on COVID-19?

Here are some helpful links to gather more information.

### Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html>

### World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/>

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

For those persons who may be concerned they may have symptoms of COVID-19, the federal government has created an **online self-assessment tool**. You will be asked a series of questions and dependent upon the responses and symptoms identified, the tool will provide advice, giving one of the following actions:

- Visit an emergency room
- Call telehealth
- Self-isolate at home

The tool can be accessed here:

<https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en>

## I feel very stressed about all of this. Should I still reach out to Homewood Health?

Absolutely. We are here for you 24/7/365 and will help get you the tools, resources and/or support you're looking for.

## What if I was already seeing a counsellor or have an upcoming appointment? How will I know what to do next?

You will be contacted shortly by the person you were seeing, or by Homewood Health, and we'll make the process really clear and simple for you so you understand how you will connect with the counsellor for your session.

Homewood Health would like to extend our thanks and express our gratitude to all first responders and health care workers, including those in public facing positions. We appreciate your efforts and support to help others during these difficult times.





Wellness Together Canada offers **no cost support and counselling, 24 hours a day**, to anyone in Canada who needs support as a result of COVID-19

**Services available at NO COST**

A mental health  
self-assessment tool

Counselling by phone,  
video or text

Group coaching  
and peer support

Self-guided courses,  
apps, and other resources

Visit: **wellnesstogether.ca** | Call: **1-866-585-0445**

Funded by Health Canada, Wellness Together Canada is a joint venture between Homewood Health, Kids Help Phone and Stepped Care Solutions and is available in both English and French.



