



Supporting You & Your Child(ren)'s Mental Health During Virtual Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many adjustments to our school year, which may create or exacerbate feelings of stress and worry for teachers, students and their caregivers. It is normal and *okay* to feel anxious, upset and overwhelmed during this time of change and uncertainty. The attached [document](#) outlines various mental health strategies and resources - complementary to those posted on [Heschel@Home](#) - which may help you and your family cope during this time. While COVID has transformed the ways in which we learn, work and communicate, our commitment to supporting you and your families - and one another - remains unchanged.

GROW SELF-AWARENESS

Identify your triggers: Write down the people, places, or activities that you associate with feelings of worry, stress, or sadness now and/or in the past.

Go to your happy place: Write down the people, places, or activities that you associate with feelings of calm, safety, or happiness now and/or in the past. While we may not be able to access these people, places or activities amidst the current government restrictions, they can provide us with feelings of HOPE for what will eventually come. As we say in Hebrew, *Gam Zeh Ya'avov* - this too shall pass.



Ask yourself: What CAN I control right now? Try to focus on that. Remember: No one can control every situation or the outcome(s) of a given situation. However, we can control how we handle and react to situations!

Reflect: What am I afraid might happen? Remember: Fears are a form of thinking. Challenge these thoughts by considering the *evidence* or *facts* that go against them.

Consider: What would a loved one/friend/mentor tell me that might help me cope with this situation? And what advice would I give to someone else who is dealing with this



situation? Remember: Treat yourself with the same compassion that you grant to others!

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Mindfulness exercises can help us calm our bodies AND minds by paying attention to the present moment - free of judgement. Finding quiet moments to connect with ourselves is critical for both children and adults. Consider trying some of the exercises below with and/or without your children:



Five-Senses Technique: Ask yourself: What are 5 things I see, 4 things I hear, 3 things I feel, 2 things I smell, 1 thing I can taste?

Box/Square Breathing: As you draw a square with your hand, breathe in for 4 seconds as your finger moves up the square; hold your breath for 4 seconds as your finger moves along the top of the square; breathe out for 4 seconds as your finger comes down the square; hold for 4 seconds as your finger moves along the bottom of the square. Repeat 4 times. Consider watching this [video](#) for a guided visual.

Teddy Bear Breathing: For students in JK - Grade 3. Ask your child to lay comfortably on their back and place their stuffed animal on their belly; as you count to 4, ask your child to slowly breathe in through their nose, watching their stuffed animal rise as their belly fills with air; then, as you count to 4, ask your child to slowly breathe out through their mouth, watching their stuffed animal fall as their belly slowly shrinks.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Gradually tense and release your body parts, including your hands, arms, jaw, face, stomach, and legs. Click [here](#) for a helpful visual.

EXPLORE NATURE

Virtual learning - and working remotely - involve a significant amount of screen-time. Consider going on a 'nature walk' or scavenger hunt with your family. You can even adopt a plant and watch it grow!





Here are some [fun ideas](#) to get you started. For some more inspiration, you can also watch this [video](#) of what a simple spring walk can inspire.

TAKE A BREAK FROM SCREENS



Get moving (and grooving): The benefits of daily exercise are not limited to those that are physical; exercise has been shown to boost one's mood and concentration, *and* it can contribute to a better night's sleep. In addition to taking a nature walk, consider having a [family dance party](#), playing a game of parachute (helpful hint: [bed-sheets](#) make for a great parachute!), or creating an at-home [obstacle course](#).

Get crafty: A growing body of [psychological research](#) is attesting to the benefits of colouring on children AND adult's mental health. Try unwinding after a long day of school or work by completing these 'low-stakes' colouring sheets with (or without!) your child. For students in Grades 5 - 8, consider printing these [colouring sheets](#); for students in JK - Grade 4,

consider printing these [colouring sheets](#); for adults, consider printing [these](#).

PRACTICE AND PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE

It has been a long time since many of us have been on an airplane; however, there is a reason why passengers are asked to put on their own oxygen mask(s) before assisting others - we must attend to our own needs in order to adequately support the needs of others. Consider completing a daily self-care challenge like the one outlined [here](#).

NEED MORE SUPPORT?

[Immediate Crisis Support](#) can be accessed 24/7 by texting WELLNESS to 741741 or CONNECT to 686868, or by calling 1 (833) 456-4566 (Crisis Services Canada)

[211 Ontario](#) can help you locate community-based mental health, housing and income supports



[Kids Help Phone](#) - Free 24/7 mental health support for children and teens. Call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.

[Mental Health T.O.](#) - Free single-session telephone/video counselling for children, youth and families. Call 1-866-585-MHTO (6486) to be connected to a counsellor; services are available Mon - Fri from 9 AM - 7 PM.

[Family Services Toronto](#) (Ages 18 +) - Free single-session virtual counselling for adults who live or work in the Greater Toronto Area. Call 416-595-9618 to be connected to a counsellor; services are available Mon - Fri from 9 AM - 6 PM.

[Ontario's I-CBT Program](#) (Ages 16 +) - Free therapist-guided cognitive behavioural therapy that addresses a wide range of concerns, including feelings of anxiety, depression, insomnia, adjustment difficulties, etc.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

[How to support your child's mental health during COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub](#)

[How school closures can strengthen your family](#)

[Supporting youth and teens during COVID](#)

[OHEL: COVID Resilience Workbook for Children](#)



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS – MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Students in JK – Grade 2

[Don't Feed The Worry Bug](#) by Andi Green

[The Invisible String](#) by Patrice Karst

[I Am Stronger Than Anger](#) by Elizabeth Cole

[The Way I Feel](#) by Janan Cain

Students in Grades 3 – 5

[What to Do When You Worry Too Much](#) by Dawn Huebner (CBT self-help book)

[Listening to My Body](#) by Gabi Garcia

[What You Do With A Problem](#) by Kobi Yamada

[Better Than You](#) by Trudy Ludwig

Students in Grades 6 – 8

[Just Feel: How To Be Stronger, Happier, Healthier and More](#) by Mallika Chopra

[Feeling Better: A CBT Workbook](#) by Rachel Hutt

[Finding Perfect](#) by Elly Swartz

[OCDaniel](#) by Wesley King

Adults and Parents

[Mind Over Mood](#) by Dr. Dennis Greenberger & Dr. Christine Padesky

[Detox Your Thoughts](#) by Andrea Bonoir

[Radical Compassion](#) by Tara Brach

[Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents](#) by Reid Wilson & Lynn Lyons

[The Explosive Child](#) by Dr. Ross Greene