

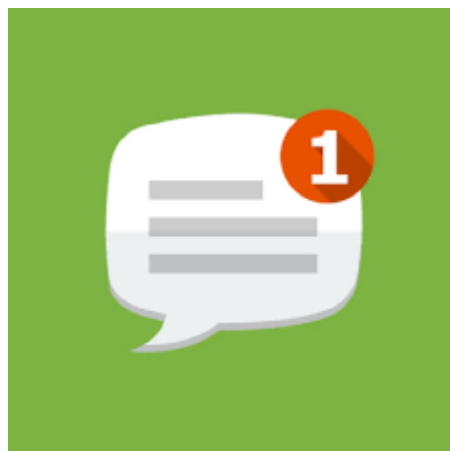
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Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services

Tips and resources for people who want to be more effective in supporting adults with mental health/substance use concerns.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR HOST



Welcome back! The Family Huddle would like to dedicate this May edition to issues related to Covid-19 and the concerns of families and friends supporting a loved one with mental illness/substance use.

As family and friends, we are not immune to the anxiety and potential effects of the stress of living with the Covid-19 pandemic. Our lives and well-being can be tested when we are sharing our homes with our loved ones or when our loved ones are isolated away from us.

This edition will focus on how to manage the stressful effects of the Covid-19 experience on our anxiety level and mood; reflect on the opportunities in physical-distancing; and emphasize the importance of compassionate care while coping with crisis.

Fraser Health and Family Support Services are here to provide support and information to help you and your loved ones' cope through this difficult time.



COVID-19 & Mental Health

Family and friends supporting loved ones during
Covid-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic sparks new concerns for everyone, caregivers must deal with many unique challenges, on top of the regular demands of supporting your loved one.

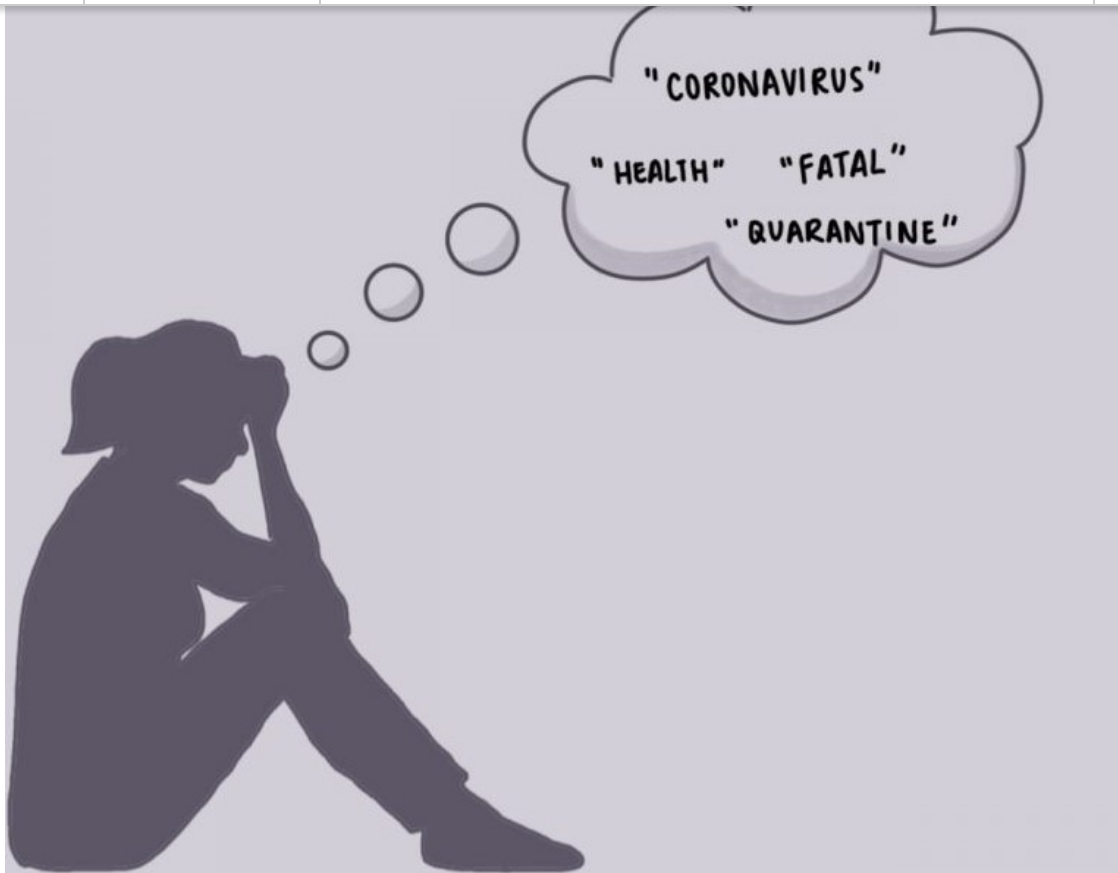
Control: It can be helpful to accept that some things are out of our control. Control is difficult because we are surrounded by unknowns. The sooner we accept the things we cannot control, the more focus and energy we will have for the things we can. As a supporter or caregiver, this might mean accepting that your routine with your loved one is not possible within the rules of physical distancing. It may mean finding a new, more flexible routine. It might also mean accepting that you do not know how long physical distancing measures will last. For example, you may aim to reassure your loved one that this is just a temporary situation and will still be available but need to connect by phone or computer instead.

Changes in behaviour and symptoms: It might also be reasonable to expect changes from your loved one. A combination of stress and uncertainty from the pandemic may mean that mental health problems will become worse or new ones will form. Escalating symptoms, when combined with personal fear or anxiety, could make supporting or caregiving much more challenging. If it does, remind yourself that any worsening of mental health symptoms, as difficult as it may be, is natural and to be expected, given the circumstances of Covid-19.

Resilience and Self-Care: Draw upon past resilience being a supporter or caregiver and recognize that it takes great resilience to walk the path of recovery. When reflecting on your journey so far, remind yourself what you have overcome to get to this point. Make time for self-care. Self-care is non-negotiable for caregivers. Although you may be inclined to put your own needs last, you need to take care of yourself before you can effectively support another person.

Reach Out: It is important to reach out to fellow caregivers and supporters. No one understands the hardships of caregiving better than another caregiver. If you have other carers in your life, consider reaching out to them. Talk openly about how the coronavirus has affected your routine with your loved one, what your biggest concerns are, and what has been helpful to you. Listening to others while also sharing creates a mutual support system and provides the human connection we all need.

Tips when connecting with your loved one



1. Manage your own anxiety first

Anxiety is almost contagious. If you are anxious and supporting an anxious person, your lack of anxiety regulation can influence your loved one's anxiety, making it worse. It is important to work on your own ability to stay calm.

2. Create emotional safety with the person

Emotional safety is the foundation for emotional regulation. When a person feels safe with the person supporting them, they create a story in their brain that tells them they can feel good about themselves, they can connect with others, and that their needs will be met.

Emotional safety needs to start with the supporter being predictable and consistent in a person's life. It is important that the person you are supporting knows what to expect from you, as this predictability makes the world increasingly secure.

3. Give anxiety a language

When we recognize our feelings, we can develop the ability to accept them, learn about them, and conquer them. When we do not understand the problem, we cannot solve it.

in your chest and your hands are shaking, you are experiencing anxiety,” or “Oh, you blanked out on what to do next. Anxiety must have hijacked your memory.”

Often the act of giving anxiety a name can calm anxiety down.

4. Acknowledge the struggle

Validate the difficulty the person is having. Do not pretend the problem does not exist. When we ignore the anxiety in hopes to make **of making** it go away, this usually fuels anxiety and makes it stronger.

You could say things like “It makes sense you would be feeling a bit anxious.” “I feel a bit anxious at times too.” “I know how important it is for you to go to the Community Centre/Clubhouse.” “That must be so frustrating for you not to be able to see anyone in the support group right now.”

5. Build solidarity

Work to communicate that we are all in this together. To get through this, we need to support each other and do our part to keep things moving forward.

6. Practice coping

As you support your friend/loved one, you are like the coach in anxiety regulation. The more times you practice a coping technique with them, the more you are reinforcing a new brain pathway. Be a broken record and practice over and over again.

Some practical strategies could involve deep breathing, tensing and relaxing muscles, doing other activities. If you share about what you have been doing for yourself, take the time to talk about how the strategies are having a physical, emotional, or, spiritual pay off for yourself.

It is also important to remember to acknowledge what your loved one or friend is doing for him/herself. Everyone is different and coping in his/her/their own way.

Acknowledging/affirming the strategies your loved one has chosen or discovered that helps manage their anxiety, or other emotions reminds them that you have confidence in them, and it allows you to let go of some of the fear and anxiety you may be experiencing about their capacity and competence to self manage their own emotions.

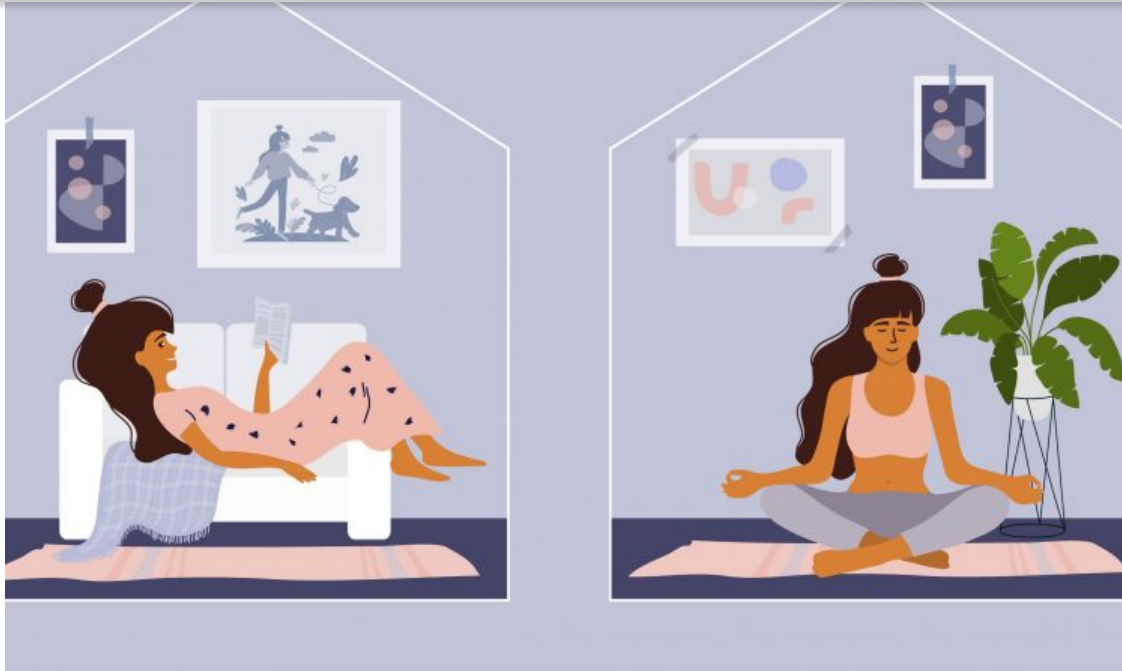
7. Be optimistic

Be genuinely hopeful for the future – this too shall pass. It is key for supports to share their hope for things getting better. It is good to talk about other difficulties you and your family member/friend have faced

*****The Mental Health & Substance Use Family Support Services program has many resources to support you – please give us a call at: 1.833.898.6200***



You may be feeling cut off from the rest of the world and sidelined by the current situation. But it's important to remember that the isolation measures now in place are designed to protect everyone, So try not to look at it as being cut off from your community, but instead as an extraordinary effort to come together to protect and help one another. What a beautiful example of solidarity!



Making the most of staying home

Make peace with solitude

- it is not fundamentally bad.
- Find the good in solitude
- Think of some of the benefits you get from solitude.
- enjoy the quiet serenity of time by yourself.
- Use time to read a good book, meditate, or keep a journal.

Quieting your mind but not necessarily your body

- Time alone is a good opportunity to reconnect with yourself and get back to what is most important.
- Consider some activities you have not done lately for lack of time?
- It could be something you enjoy like painting or knitting, or those family photos you would like to organize.

Practice physical distancing, not social isolation

- Right now, health officials require everyone to stay at home and avoid physical contact with others, that does not mean we need to be socially isolated.
- Physical isolation does not prevent you from keeping up your relationships with loved ones.

Use your support network

- Despite the physical separation, assistance and support services are being created. For example, you can get your food and medication delivered to your home to avoid exposure from public spaces.

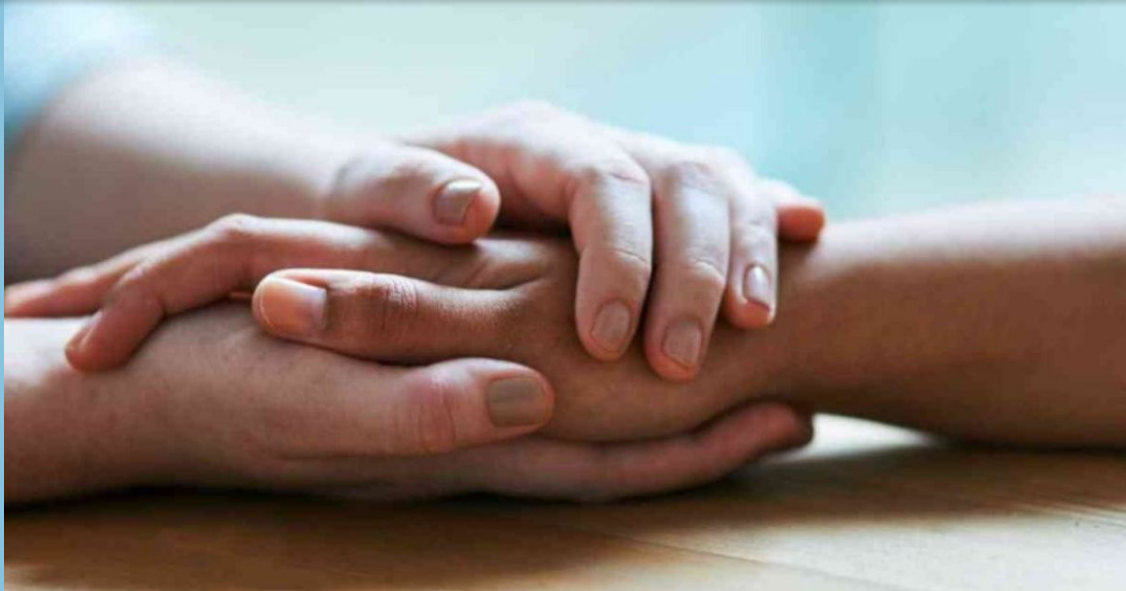


Did you know that ...

It all depends on your perspective

We also have power over our own perceptions. You can choose to look at this lockdown time as an obstacle to your daily activities, or as an opportunity to get back to certain practices. So many comforting and enjoyable activities are still available, perhaps in a different format. Keep an open mind and be creative!

And remember, this situation is temporary.



Supporting your loved one through crisis including Covid -19

Social theory suggests that people with emotional dysregulation (E.g. Borderline Personality disorder; substance use; severe anxiety) have strong stress responses due to a sensitive and reactive limbic system. As the limbic system is activated it is important for families to practice validation skills more than ever.

Families or friends in times of stress and crisis may fall back into old habits. Families may forget validation skills and wish to support a loved one by being judgemental, criticize decisions, or trying to problem-solve too quickly. Family members and friends providing support need coping tools to validate themselves and their own efforts.

Three essential skills for long term crisis management

Radical Acceptance

- Radical acceptance means accepting how things are from a place of openness and willingness.
- We do not have to agree with the situation

1. There are many ways to practice radical acceptance:

- the rest of the family sick and this is frustrating and scary.
3. Stick to the FACTS: Focus your attention on describing the situation in factual terms. No judgment. This can be challenging. E.g. My loved one has heard the importance of social distancing and will spend time with his friends despite knowing the risk.
 4. Make a conscious decision to approach the situation from a place of openness. E.g. Be curious; be mindful of body posture and language; facial expressions. "Where are my eyebrows right now?" "I am willing to listen and accept that the situation is as it is."

In conclusion, radical acceptance does not mean agreeing: It means "Even though I can't change the situation I am coming from the best position I can come from."

Relationship Mindfulness

- Is about connection
- Using skills to meaningfully connect with loved ones. This includes the validation of emotions, experiences, and values.
- Having and expressing empathy is key. We strive to put ourselves in the other person's shoes.
- Having empathy and validating our loved one's experience does not mean we have to agree with their perceptions or behavior.
- During the time of a crisis is the most important time to use a mindful connection to our loved one. It is more effective than in low-stress times. Especially, purposefully "making the effort" to connect. This will give your relationship a boost.
- In the time of Covid-19, give creativity a try. E.g. find creative ways to webcast. Virtually make meals together; play games and go out of your way to schedule these activities. Make a mindful effort in advance.
- Acknowledge your own and your loved one's stress. Irritability, dependency, and quick-changing moods are some ways stress is expressed. Validate, validate, validate.

Cope Ahead

- Develop a concrete step-by-step plan to use in the event of a crisis.
- e.g. "What am I going to do if I get Covid-19 and get very sick?"

2. Plan: (who, what, where, when) Collectively come up with all kinds of ideas and alternate plans, anticipate problems. What skills will I use?

3. Rehearse plan: (maybe with loved one or spouse and other key family members.) This way, everyone knows what comes next. Again, problem solve in advance. “What if this happens?” ...
Keep in mind that planning ahead is stressful and can trigger emotional dysregulation. However, the benefit of coping ahead helps our loved one manage their stress. Key point: Validate emotions and remind planning will help them manage their stress. Coping ahead needs to be flexible because things change. Plans may need to be updated or tweaked.

During times of Covid-19 it is important to manage our own stress through limiting our access to information on television, news etc. How much time do we really need focusing on Covid-19 daily?

- In times of crisis focus on living your life and maintaining routine as much as possible.
- Check and monitor if we are in “emotional mind” or using “wise mind” skills.

For more information about these skills and webinars please see this link from NEABPD <https://www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.org/>

REFERENCES and RESOURCES

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/>

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-family-support-services-and-resources#.XqX-J2hKj-g>

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/>

<https://sashbear.org/en/>

www.anxietycanada.com

www.cmha.ca



Reflective Box

Courage doesn't always roar.

Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day
saying,

I will try again tomorrow.

Mary Anne Radmacher



May 21

National Schizophrenia & Psychosis
Awareness Day

Family Support Services On-line Summer Education Series is taking registrations now.

To Register

<https://form.simplesurvey.com/f/1/FSSPRegistration>

**FANS On-line support
groups coming soon! Visit
the Fraser Health Family
Support Services
webpage regularly for
updates or contact us for
more information.**

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-family-support-services-and-resources#.XrG-EKhKj-h>

CONTACT

Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services
Monday-Thursday
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
(hours may vary to include evenings)

1 (833) 898-6200



Call the Fraser Health crisis line:

604-951-8855 or
1-877-820-7444 (toll free)

Trained volunteers provide emotional crisis support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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