



March 2020

Creating Emotional Regulation During the COVID 19 Outbreak: Practical Information for Parents/Caregivers and their Children.

Emotional regulation is critical in the middle of uncertainty. Feelings such as fear, anxiety, stress, boredom are all normal responses at this time. With the COVID19 global crisis, families face such things as indefinite suspension of classroom attendance, working from home, activity and event cancellations, and concern for loved ones; particularly the elderly. Many think of regulation as “being calm” when in fact it is more about staying connected to one’s self. A connection to self can be achieved quickly by noticing what one is feeling and then taking long deep breaths with equal inhaled and exhaled.

The way we breathe dramatically affects our nervous system. When a person is regulated in a moment, they can think clearly, make a conscious choice, notice their breath, and feel grounded. What is really wonderful is that a caregiver can in fact be an “external regulator” for a child. If the caregiver works toward their own regulation, through naming their experience out loud, breath, and movement, then the child can naturally follow suit.

With many families at home together at this time, building in regulation activities throughout the day is key. Listed below are some examples of activities that can be used to help regulate a dysregulated nervous system. It will be helpful to do these pro-actively as well as in times of dysregulation.

- Be around or connected with familiar and close relationships
- Breathe, breathe, breathe,
- Run, jump, spin, dance with pauses to take deep breaths
- Bounce on a yoga ball or roll across the floor back and forth.
- Massages or deep pressure on arms and legs
- Take a bath or shower, splash cold water
- Walk, run, and move any way that feels good.
- Make a game and have child jump high to catch something.
- Art, board games, listen to music.

Other ways to support children:

- Check in with your child on a regular basis and clarify any misunderstandings
- Help them express their feelings through art or other activities
- Keep your family’s schedule consistent with bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- Shift expectations to focus on what gives the family meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.
- Give yourself breaks from stress of the situation.
- Play and enjoy things that we often do not have time for!

### **PRESCHOOL**

#### **Reactions**

- Fear of being alone, bad dreams
- Speech difficulties
- Loss of bladder/bowel control
- Change in appetite
- Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging
- Maintain regular family routines

#### **How to help**

- Patience and tolerance
- Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)
- Encourage expression through play/story-telling
- Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements
- Plan calming activities before bedtime
- Avoid media exposure

## SCHOOL AGE (ages 6-12)

Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior  
Clinging, nightmares

Sleep/appetite disturbance  
Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)  
Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest  
Competition for parents' attention  
Forgetfulness about chores

Patience, tolerance, and reassurance  
Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet  
Regular exercise and stretching  
Engage in educational activities  
Set gentle but firm limits  
Limit media exposure  
Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines.  
Encourage expression through play and conversation.

## ADOLESCENTS AGES (13 – 18)

Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)  
Sleep/appetite disturbance

Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy  
Ignoring health promotion behaviors

Concerns about stigma and injustices

Isolating from peers and loved ones.

Patience, tolerance, and reassurance  
Encourage continuation of routines  
Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors  
Stay in touch with friends through phone, internet, video games  
Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors.  
Limit media exposure. Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and in injustice occurring.

*All of us who are parents, grandparents, and caregivers will benefit greatly from taking time throughout the day to breathe intentionally, regulate our own thoughts and feelings as best we can and then celebrate and be grateful for our loving presence in the lives of our children.*

To book a telephone counselling session contact our office: 250 746 9600



## Vancouver Island Counselling

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