



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

March 23, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Our district team and partner groups have been working together to create a continuation of learning plan for your children. Face-to-face classes will not be offered for most children beginning March 30th, and we ask that you please do not send your child to school. The Ministry of Education has emphasised that schools will support essential service workers' children and we will update you as we receive more information on how we will be providing this service.

We want to assure you that your children will still be learning, but in a different way. We are very committed to your children's learning and are creating a framework for kindergarten to grade 12 that will support each grade level, respectively. School staffs will be planning on what the learning will look like the week of March 30 – April 3rd and they will be communicating their learning plans for your children once they are in place.

We are also in the process of updating our website and will provide links for parents and guardians in the coming days. As we receive updates from the Ministry of Education, we will also place these on our website.

We are also working to 'close' our play structures at schools. All school ground play structures will be wrapped in bright yellow 'caution' tape indicating they should not be accessed. Signage indicating the structures are closed will be installed at each site. This decision was made based on clear messaging from our Provincial Health Officer about the need to implement social distancing as a strategy to help combat the spread of COVID-19. As well, we are not able to sanitize these structures.

Social distancing means making changes in your everyday routines in order to minimize close contact with others. These changes include everyone, including children and teenagers.

Specifically, everyone should:

- avoid crowded places and non-essential gatherings;
- avoid common greetings, such as handshakes and hugs;
- limit contact with people at higher risk (for example, older adults and those in poor health); and
- keep a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 metres) from others, as much as possible.

The following are some suggestions regarding how you can practice social distancing:

- greet with a wave instead of a handshake or hug;
- stay at home as much as possible;
- limit in-person shopping to essentials;

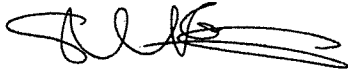
- conduct virtual meetings;
- host virtual playdates for children; and
- use technology to keep in touch with friends and family.

We have also provided information on *Ways to Manage Stress and Anxiety and Support Our Children* for your reference below.

Thank you for your understanding during this unprecedented time. We are thinking of our families, our staff and our community and we assure you we will do everything we can to support you. We have a wonderful team of dedicated Trustees and Staff who are here to support you in the best way we can.

We will be in touch as more information becomes available.

Sincerely,



Silke Yardley
Superintendent



Alan Rice
Secretary Treasurer

Ways to Manage Stress and Anxiety and Support Our Children

The COVID-19 pandemic may be a very stressful and frightening time for our children. While it is important to remember that fear and anxiety about disease is normal, excessive worry is not. All individuals will respond differently during stressful times, and anger, confusion and guilt are common ways children respond to world events. However, there are many things we can do as parents to support our children during these extraordinary times. All individuals manage stress in different ways. When stress becomes unhealthy certain actions may arise. Signs of unhealthy stress include, significant fear or worry, change in sleeping patterns, change in diet or eating patterns, change in overall health, and even substance abuse.

When talking to our kids about the current situation, a solutions focused approach is crucial. Things to keep in mind when having these discussions include:

- Many things are being done to help the current situation (governments, doctors, nurses, schools, ...)
- It will get better
- Life will return to normal
- Focus on caring for our family and friends

Here are some ways to support our children:

1. All Children

- i. Routines are important and can help to create a sense of predictability and security. Some examples of routines include scheduling daily academic time, outdoor activities and family time. Focus on the moment, mindfulness (sit quietly and focus on breathing and your senses)
- ii. Role model calmness, routine, and a focus on family and friends
- iii. It is appropriate to provide a fact-based discussion on the changing landscape of COVID-19. This discussion should be done in a calm and reassuring tone conveying the message that we are safe. We take precautions, but we are safe. Listen, provide age-appropriate information and focus on prevention (daily handwashing, social distancing)
- iv. Focus on the positive, change in outlook from: 'we are stuck inside' to a focus on family and home

2. Older Students

- i. Social Media: limiting social media and news watching. Watching the news together can provide an opportunity for conversation and help to keep things in perspective. Moderation in gaming time
- ii. Nutrition: eat as healthy as you can. Make balanced meals that you can prepare together
- iii. Sleep: try to ensure that older students are still getting enough sleep.

www.sleepfoundation.org

3. Younger students

- i. Stress: younger students may show their stress in different ways. For example; crying, irritation, 'acting out', reduced attention and concentration, regression to an earlier age such as bedwetting, and ceasing activities that they previously enjoyed
 - a. Strategies to help reduce stress in younger students:
 - More time with trusted adults
 - Increased play time, inside and out
 - Routines
 - Quiet times, to read books, listen to music, puzzles and playing board games
 - Adequate sleep

Younger children may scare more easily than older children so focusing on the positive can be very helpful. As an example, the American Television personality, Fred Rogers (Mr. Rogers), had a famous quote: "when I was a boy, I would see scary things on the news, my mother would say to me, look for the helpers, you will always find people that are helping."

Finally, our kids will feel safer if they express their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. One of our jobs as parents is to role model resiliency, and during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can do our best to be calm and caring. Our children are looking to us to see how we react. Therefore, if you are struggling with stress and anxiety over this pandemic, then it is important that you also seek help. Some resources are listed below. As well, check with your employer to determine if they have counselling services available through local Employee and Family Assistance Programs.

Local supports:

Kids help phone: 1-800-668-6868

Child Youth and Mental Health: (250) 426-1400

Child and Family Services: 250-426-1514

Crisis Line: 1-888-353-2273