



Hello,

I hope everyone had a chance to enjoy your spring break amidst the chaos of the current health crisis.

These are extraordinary times, even though we are physically separated, please know the counselling team is here to support our Burnaby Central community. As we start to connect with our students this week, please ensure the Burnaby Central counselling team is here to support each and everyone of you with our students and parents along this journey. This is an unprecedented time for all of us. At Burnaby Central, it has always been clear: to support and care for our students as individuals, and to be compassionate and supportive for our school community. It is also important that you know how deeply committed we are to continue supporting our students in the way we always have, but also in deeper ways now as we work together to meet new challenges in the weeks and months ahead.

Students may experience a range of emotions during the COVID-19 situation. As well, changes in routine, including time away from school, friends, no leisure activities, team sports may create some challenges for some students. They have lost their reference points, or at least their routine. When confined to their homes, our children need to be listened to and especially need that we answer their questions wisely and calmly, if they have some. We must not rush them, our adult emotions can easily be transferred to our children.

You may also notice that they are anxious or unsettled, and perhaps have told you that they are worried about someone in the family getting the virus. They may be confused about why usual activities are disrupted or may be disappointed to miss something that they were looking forward to. All of these things are very natural at this uncertain time.

During these challenging times, you may be worried about your child(ren)'s mental health and well-being. We also understand that young people with pre-existing mental health problems may find their symptoms increasing in light of the current uncertainties. If you have any concerns about your child or your child expressing their struggles, please connect with the respective school counsellor. The counselling team will be able to assist you. The counselling team will connect and support our students and families during this challenging time. Counsellors have resources for our students and families can access online or telephone counselling as well as self-help options to share with our school community.

The pandemic we are currently living takes on a different meaning for our children. How can we help them overcome the anxiety they might live during this time of turmoil in their daily routine? Here are a few helpful hints:

#### **How can I keep my child or teen mentally well during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

As parents and family members, the best thing we can do is maintain communication with our children and to be patient and understanding.

The following tips give you some ideas to keep in mind. Of course, you know your child best, so consider these tips based on your own family situation.

- **Be patient and understanding.** Think back to when you were a teen and how important your social connections were (and likely still are!). Teens are dealing with less social contact and cancelled events. This can be upsetting. Try to be patient and understanding – try not to minimize their feelings. Instead, listen and express compassion.
- **Encourage balance.** Some teens may turn to Netflix, social media or gaming as a distraction from the day-to-day reality of social distancing—this is to be expected and you may also find you’re looking for distractions yourself. Taking breaks from screen time is helpful. Plus, too much social media exposure can have a negative impact on mental health. It’s a good idea for all of us to prioritize wellness as much as possible at this time. Try to encourage regular sleep habits. You could invite your teen to get outside for daily walks with you, or to do some cooking together.
- **Pause before talking.** With so much news coverage and talk about COVID-19, over exposure is very possible. You can provide a break for your teen by not discussing the situation in front of them unless they want to talk about it.
- **Listen and provide reassurance when you can.** Some teens may be worried about the health of their friends and family members, about the size of the pandemic locally and globally, or about lost class time and their ability to complete courses. If they express concerns to you, listen to their concerns and try to provide reassurance. You can talk about how measures are in place to keep people safe, how you’ve prepared as a family, and how life will return to normal. For teens who are concerned about lost class time and completing courses, reassure them that school staff understand and appreciate their concern. Tell them more information will come and you’ll work through it together.

### **What are the signs my teen might be struggling with their mental health?**

Sometimes changes in behavior or emotions are a sign that students need more support for their mental health.

Here are some signs to watch for:

- Changes in behaviour or emotions that seem out of proportion even with the current circumstances (e.g., angry outbursts, depressed mood, sense of panic).
- The changes last most of the day, every day.
- The changes last for a sustained period of time (e.g., more than a week).
- The changes seem to interfere with your child’s or teen’s thoughts, feelings or daily functioning – for example, they may not do activities they normally enjoy, they’re crying more than usual, or they may not interact with you as much as they usually do.
- Your child or teen tells you they’re feeling sad or anxious a lot.
- If your child expresses thoughts of hurting them self or engages in suicidal behavior, seek help from a mental health professional immediately (or emergency protocol call 911).

### **How to talk with your child when you feel concerned, they maybe struggling with a mental health problem?**

It can be challenging to talk about mental health. Sometimes parents, like others, avoid the conversation because they don’t know how to start or they worry that they might put thoughts into their child’s head that had not been there, and will, therefore, make things worse. Research tells us that this is not the case. Bringing up worries, concerns, changes in behaviour etc. with your child will open the lines of communication rather than worsen the situation.

Here are some tips to help you talk to your child about mental health:

- Find a quiet time when you are unlikely to have interruptions to begin the conversation.
- Reassure your child that they can tell you anything and you will not get angry with them (even if you get scared).
- Start the conversation with describing changes you have noticed in their mood, behaviour, reactions etc.e.g., “I have noticed that you seem to be crying more.” If you have had conversations with your child’s teacher about concerns, include comments from the teacher’s observations.
- Share that you “wonder” about how your child might be feeling, what they might be thinking, what they might be worried about etc. e.g., “I wonder if you’re feeling sad about losing your friendship with Sam.”
- Allow your child time to reflect before they answer.
- Stay calm and don’t abandon the conversation if your child responds with “Nothing is wrong.....leave me alone”. If this happens, reassure your child that you are there for them. Give your child some time and then try again.
- If your child tells you anything that makes you worried ( e.g., thoughts of suicide, overwhelming anxiety, self-injurious behaviour like cutting) reassure your child that you are glad they told you and you will help them find the right professional to talk to, and you will be there for them throughout the journey.

### How can I access help for my teen’s mental health?

If your child is experiencing a mental health emergency, call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room in your local hospital.

Here are some other suggestions. **Resources for Children and Youth to access online counselling/mental health support:**

- Children and teens can speak with a counsellor 24/7 by calling Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868. Kids Help Phone 24/7 support (call, text, chat): <https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/were-here-for-you-during-covid-19-novel-coronavirus/>
- Crisis Centre of B.C. is offering free online resources such as "Tools for Managing Uncertainty and Change: <https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/special-programming-during-the-current-health-situation/>
- Online chat service for youth who need someone to talk to about the stress of COVID-19 or any other issue: [www.YouthInBC.com](http://www.YouthInBC.com) (noon to 1am). Online chat service for adults: [www.CrisisCentreChat.ca](http://www.CrisisCentreChat.ca) (noon to 1am).
- Anxiety Canada –<https://www.anxietycanada.com/> – Interactive resource for youth to get information and strategies to manage anxiety. Also have free MindShift App
- Kelty Mental Health – <http://keltymentalhealth.ca> - Youth in Residence – Support for youth, by youth who live with mental illness.
- [www.dwdonline.ca](http://www.dwdonline.ca) -Dealing with Depression Workbook for Teens – free online resources
- <https://bouncebackbc.ca/> – is a free skill-building program designed to help adults and youth 15+ manage low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry. Delivered online or over the phone with a coach. *School counsellors and family doctors can refer.*
- <https://mindcheck.me/> - check how your mental health is going and keep track of your improvement, FREE and PRIVATE. (Foundrybc.ca)
- <https://www.secondstep.org/covid19support> - Access to MindYeti mindfulness program sessions/videos as well as other Second Step resources for ages 5 to 18

**Resources for Parents for support:**

- Information Children – <http://www.informationchildren.com> – offers a Parent Helpline, Parent Coaching and Parenting Pamphlets to families free of charge
- Kelty Mental Health – <http://keltymentalhealth.ca> - Parent in Residence – Our PIR, Graeme, is still offering support by phone and email. [Graeme.partridge-david@familysmart.ca](mailto:Graeme.partridge-david@familysmart.ca)
- Help for parents in supporting their anxious kids: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/talking-to-kids-about-covid-19/>
- <https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/special-programming-during-the-current-health-situation/> - Offering free online course beginning April 1<sup>st</sup> by Webinar *Tools for Managing Stress and Burnout*

Please contact your child’s counsellor at Burnaby Central Secondary if you have any questions or concerns:

Ms. Westinghouse	Last Names (A - F)	Rosa.Westinghouse@burnabyschools.ca
Ms. Basran	Last Names (G - Lim)	Angela.Basran@burnabyschools.ca
Ms. Jones	Last Names (Lin – Se)	Rhiannon.Jones@burnabyschools.ca
Mr.Mann	Last Names (Sf – Z)	Vijay.Mann@burnabyschools.ca

We thank you for your patience as we implement new systems to facilitate at-home learning. Know that we care very deeply about your children and will be doing our best to provide not only a meaningful, high-quality learning experience for them during this uncertain and unusual time but also an engaging and memorable community experience. Together as a community, we will thrive through this!

If there are any questions, please connect with me any time.

***Thank you,***

***Angela Basran  
Student Services Department Head  
Burnaby Central Secondary School***

