

April 8, 2020

Dear Northwest School Division Families;

As plans for continued learning are rolling out and teachers have made connections with students, we wanted to provide some further details for how we will continue to support students with additional needs and students on IIPs.

Our Student Support Services team will continue to work in a collaborative manner with parents and caregivers, if you choose. Initial contacts from your child's classroom teacher, school Student Support Services Teacher, or a supporting professional should have already taken place. We are now starting to plan for supporting each student with their learning goals.

In an at home learning environment, our service delivery will look different, but we will strive to meet the needs of families by utilizing a variety of different tactics. We may use online tools, email, phone or create take home learning packages.

If you need to reach out to one of our supporting professionals, please do so via email. All school division emails follow the same formula: firstname.lastname@nwsd.ca. You may also contact the Meadow Lake Office at the will direct your call to the appropriate person, who will then return your call.

Support for our students' mental health is a top priority during this time. Our counsellors are making arrangements for regular contacts with their students. We have also created a secure email account that families can reach out to if they feel their student needs counselling support. Counselling referrals should include:

- Student name
- School
- Grade
- A brief description of the concern

Referrals should be emailed to: counsellor@nwsd.ca.

Finally, our division has reached out to our local food banks and other agencies that support food security for our communities. This situation has placed a lot of strain on family resources, and we want to connect families with the supports they need. Please contact your child's school and the Wellness Coordinator can help you access food support, if they have not already.

Our counsellors have created some Tips for Parents and a Gratitude Scavenger Hunt to support parents and caregivers, so we have included it here.

Thank you for your support. We will continue to reach out and connect with families in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Williamson
Superintendent of Student Support Services

Covid 19 Health and Wellness Tips for Families

The Covid 19 pandemic is presenting us with a rapid state of change in our community and in our world. This can feel like a roller coaster of emotions. It is normal for everyone to be feeling a little unsettled. For parents and children who are likely home together 24 hours a day with no school or activities to keep busy, this can present many challenges. Your NWSA Counselling Team wants to offer you some thoughts on what your children might be experiencing during this time, and some strategies to help. What we are providing is a guideline. It might not all apply to you, but hopefully it will create some understanding of the behaviors you might see in your kids.

1. The first tip is to be easy on yourself. You are not supposed to have this all figured out. Change is hard and we are all trying to find a new routine.
2. This is hard for most people, but depending on your age, stage, and personality, everyone's experience is different. Understanding yourself and others, will increase compassion. Compassion will bring greater understanding, and a smoother roller coaster ride. One thing we have seen and heard from many is that what is right for one child is different for another.

Now, let's look at what has changed for the kids in your household.

1. Routine.

The number one tip we are hearing from all mental health professionals is to keep some sort of routine for your family. Routine will help adults keep their own self-regulation in check, but for most kid's routine is even more crucial. When kids know what is expected, and they have a structured routine, it helps them feel safe and regulated. When kids are regulated and calm, the intensity of their emotions is manageable. If you are seeing intense emotions, it might be helpful to get back in routine. Sleep would be the first thing to assess. A regular bedtime and wake time are essential for most kids to do well. However regular mealtimes, times for outdoor play or games etc. might also be helpful for kids who thrive on routine. Hey, they might even help keep parents on schedule!

2. Playmates.

Having other kids around, and the hustle and bustle of recess and activity times at school will be missed. One aspect of this is physical touch. Think about your kids hanging with their friends, even your teenagers. Play, friendship, joking around, sports, projects etc. all includes a lot of physical touch. Teachers often give kids high fives, a touch on the shoulder for a job well done, or an invited hug. For some kids who really need this, they may be feeling extra lonely. Parents and siblings can be mindful that some might be needing extra hugs and some physical playtime.

3. Safety.

Kids often have big fears and it is the adults around them who help them calm these fears with rational thought, reassurance and a calm voice. However even the adults around them right now may be struggling to let go of fear. This virus has shut down the whole world. Where would they go to be safe or avoid this fear? Kids are used to hearing us say "We will go to the doctor and the Dr. will make it all better." Not now. They are hearing that there is no cure, no vaccine, and even the doctors and nurses are getting sick. The hospitals are overrun and can't help everyone. This news sounds like the virus is a monster and for some kids this will be very vivid in their imagination and incredibly scary. PLEASE limit the amount of news you are listening to. Adults can tune in for 10-15 minutes a day to get caught up on anything new, preferably early in the day so it doesn't affect your sleep. Then adults can relay the news on to their kids in a way they feel the kids can manage and understand. You know your kids best, so you will know how much to give them, but it is likely

that the media is too much for them to manage. Excessive media watching is not good at any age.

4. Social Life.

The teenagers in your life might really be missing their social life. They will most likely be a bit grumpy. That is ok. It is also normal for them to be a little self-centered and really focussed on how this is affecting them personally rather than looking at the global situation or thinking of others. It is ok. This is really on par for where their brain is at developmentally. They are not selfish and self-centered. They are teenagers. Friendships are the most important aspect of their life. Encourage video chats, and keeping in touch with their friends. It truly is important. This would be a great time to get them printing off pictures with their friends and making photo boards or albums so they can reminisce and see their friend's faces. However, teenagers can also shift their focus to doing random acts of kindness for others. Maybe shovelling someone's driveway, cleaning a car or baking some cookies to share etc... This is also a great time to teach our teens some life skills like cooking, maybe some traditional family recipes, gardening etc.... Just go easy on them, this is tough.

5. Learning.

When all of this first started there was such a focus on the fact that parents need to homeschool. Please let that go. If you choose, your child's teachers will provide the schoolwork that is needed. Instead of worrying about academics, use this time to be with your kids visiting, playing board games, doing projects together etc... Your kids are inadvertently learning from you all day. They are learning coping, relationship, self-care, life skills. That is enough. The goal is to keep the love of learning alive in all kids. The love of learning is so much more important than the learning itself. Time with their caregivers learning something new will be a highlight for them at the end of all of this. Some kids get a lot of esteem from learning and find it exciting. For those kids, keep it coming, but no pressure if they just want to play. Learning through play is important too!

There are a lot of great resources out there for parents, however it can be hard to decipher all the information. Here are a couple resources we have found helpful.

- CTRI offers a free webinar called Mental Health and Resiliency during COVID 19. This one is great for adults to build their own coping skills however; the second part of the webinar is some tips for supporting kids during this time as well. Go to: training@ctrinstitute.com

Along the top click on free resources. It will be listed there.

- Janine Halloran has a weekly podcast called Calm & Connected. She has some of them posted on YouTube as well. She offers up coping strategies, social skills, and activity ideas for younger kids each week. Her website is called Coping Skills for Kids.
- Dr. Jody Carrington is on all social media platforms and shares a lot of great information. She is easy to listen to and makes all this a little less scary.

Gratitude

Scavenger Hunt for Kids

1. Find something outside you enjoy looking at
2. Find something that is useful for you
3. Find something that is your favorite color
4. Find something you know someone else will enjoy
5. Find something that makes you happy
6. Find something that tastes good
7. Find something that smells amazing
8. Discover something new
9. Find something that makes you feel safe
10. Find something that makes a beautiful sound
11. Find someone you are grateful for
12. Find something that is unique to you
13. Find something that makes you laugh
14. Find something in the night that you enjoy
15. Find something in the morning that you enjoy
16. Find a friend/pet that you love spending time with
17. Find your favorite place to spend alone time
18. Find something that reminds you of the people you love
19. Find something that you enjoy doing outside with friends
20. Find a place that you love