

# Staying Mentally Healthy During Covid-19



# Message from the CAO

When the COVID-19 pandemic entered our daily lives, routines were affected, at home and at work. As the pandemic has evolved, it has reminded us at the Town of Caledon of the importance of being strategic, inclusive, and providers of excellence in Customer Service.

Flexibility, due diligence, and continued communication are all key factors for each of us to continue to work in a safe and productive manner.

Over the past six months, we have discovered that the changes to our daily work environment have presented a COVID fatigue that has affected everyone. It often becomes a challenge to create a healthy work-life balance. We're not taking breaks or stopping by each other's offices to brainstorm or to touch base with our co-workers.

Now more than ever, we need to be mindful to reach out to each other virtually and to listen carefully. It is important that we utilize our newly acquired efficiencies with compassion and creativity and support the needs of others.

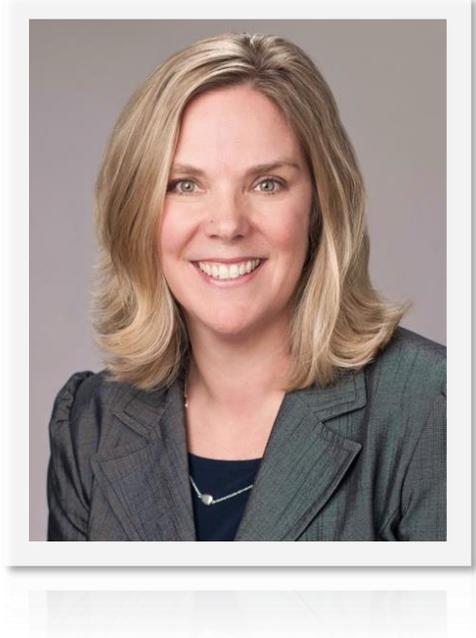
During these uncertain times, taking care of our mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing is important. Self-care can be incredibly difficult, but if we support each other and make this a priority, we will continue to be a strong Team Caledon.

This short guide is intended to provide you with support.

Thank you and stay well,



Carey Herd  
Chief Administrative Officer



# Let's get started...

## COVID fatigue is setting in

We're tired of being cooped up, tired of being careful, tired of the restrictions. We've reached a bit of a mental health breaking point. We're stressed, burned out and more anxious than we've been in a long time.

Many people spent the Spring indoors with the hopes of returning to normal in the Summer, but those hopes were dashed.



Abnormal is the new normal. We are fatigued.

It is quite well-known that sleep plays an essential restorative function for human health. The more we worry, the less we sleep, and the less we sleep, the more prone we are to struggle with our emotions and feel stressed.

How can you be at your work Teams meeting when your toddler found a Sharpie and is using it to redecorate your living room? The demands of this situation and others like it exceed our current coping resources, and when we don't have adequate resources, or even when we don't think we have adequate resources, situations and events seem out of our control.

But wait – take a deep breath - we *can* help ourselves. We know that people are highly resilient and can adapt to all kinds of difficult circumstances, and often do this by trying to *increase* their coping resources. And the best way to develop coping skills is by understanding what we are feeling, accepting the “right now”, talking about it with others and by undertaking some constructive thinking.

We can't change the situation, but we can adjust our thinking.

**Not sure where to start? Not sure what will work for you?** We've put together some resources and information on the next few pages to help you create your own **Self-Care Toolkit**. Take a read through and pick the ones you think might work for you. And you can always come back for more.

Some of the most comforting words in the universe are “me too...”. That moment when you find out that your struggle is also someone else’s struggle, that you’re not alone, and that others have been down the same road.

Author Unknown

## Build your own self-care toolkit!

Self-care looks different for everyone. A lot of successful self-care strategies will include some of the tools we’ve provided here for you as well as sensory components involving the seven senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (comforting pressure).

The sensory piece of your tool-kit will be what makes you feel good – 30 minutes a day wrapped in a blanket with a good book; a hot chocolate with extra marshmallows; a visit to the dog park; a phone call to your best friend; etc.



## Resources

1. [Togetherall](#) is a free online mental health peer support network for Ontarians 16+, to connect with others and share how you’re feeling.
2. [Take a few moments](#) and listen to these [short video vignettes](#) (produced by Dr. Joti Samra) that address anxiety and stress arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. [How are you feeling right now?](#) How is your mood? The Canadian Mental Health Association has a quick online test called the [Mental Health Meter](#). You can take it as often as you’d like – just check in and see how you’re managing.

# Toolkit Tips

A little bit of anxiety is not a bad thing as it makes us conscious about the decisions we're making when it comes to our health. It also encourages us to be prepared. Below are a few tips we would like you to review.

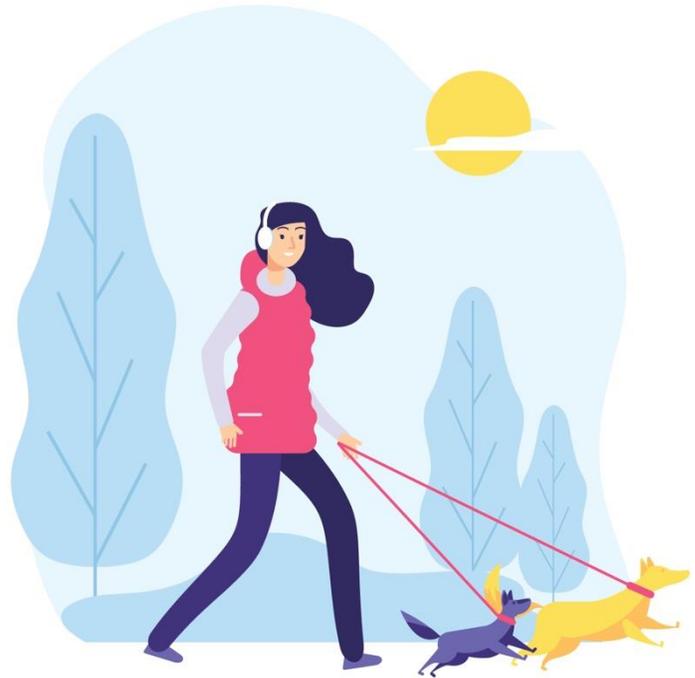
1. **Keep perspective.** Though it is important to stay informed it is also important to keep perspective. Do not spend too much time checking the news channels. Remember to also spend time on other important and positive things in your life.
2. **Take precautions.** Once you've determined what the recommended precautions are, incorporate those into your regular routine – regular handwashing, wearing a cloth mask and following the physical distance guidelines are key.
3. **Stay connected.** Have a support network of people you talk to when you're feeling anxious – this can help keep you grounded and remind you to keep the perspective you need.
4. **Use your coping skills.** If you experience anxiety in other areas of your life remember to engage in the practices that *you may have already learned* to help manage your anxiety levels. For example, engaging in regular mindfulness, taking a few deep breaths, getting outdoors, getting enough rest, eating healthy and listening to music.
5. **Seek extra help.** If you're still struggling with your anxiety or experiencing panic that is affecting your ability to maintain your regular activities, consider seeking additional support, as many others do.
6. **Practice self-care.** Self-care and resiliency are critically important during these challenging times, as worries can escalate if we aren't taking care of ourselves. Resilience is the ability to roll with the punches. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you may still experience normal emotions such as anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning.

# Manage isolation

What used to be a normal day with comfortable routines, instead has become another long day for you, especially if you are in a work from home/remote work arrangement. These times can be challenging, so now is the time to focus on you and your mental wellness.

Try some of these ideas to keep you “even keel” and bring some normalcy to each day.

1. **Stick to a routine.** Go to sleep and wake up at a reasonable time, write a schedule that’s varied and includes time for work as well as time for self-care.
2. **Dress for the day, everyday!** Get showered and dressed in comfortable clothes, wash your face, brush your teeth. Take the time to do a facial or try that new charcoal mask. Put on some bright colours. It’s amazing how we dress can impact our mood.
3. **Get outside at least once a day, for at least thirty minutes.** If you’re concerned about contact, try first thing in the morning, or later in the evening, and try less traveled streets. If you’re high risk or living with those who are, open the windows and blast the fan. It’s amazing how much fresh air can do for your spirit!
4. **Find some time to move each day, again daily for at least thirty minutes.** If you don’t feel comfortable going outside, there are many YouTube videos that offer free movement classes, and if all else fails, turn on the music and have a dance party!
5. **Reach out to others, you guessed it, at least once daily for thirty minutes.** Try to do FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, texting—connect with other people to seek out and provide support. Don’t forget to do this for your children as well.
6. **Stay hydrated and eat well.** This one may seem obvious, but stress and eating often don’t mix well. We often find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat some good and nutritious foods, and challenge yourself to learn how to cook something new!



7. **Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and a wide berth.** A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It's important to move with grace through blowups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges and continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.
8. **Focus on safety and attachment.** We're going to be living for a bit with the unprecedented demand of meeting work deadlines, homeschooling children, running a sterile household, and making a whole lot of entertainment in confinement. We can get wrapped up in meeting expectations in all domains, but we must remember these are scary and unpredictable times for children. Focus on strengthening the connection through time spent following their lead, through physical touch, through play, and via verbal reassurances that you will be there for them in this time.
9. **Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance.** This idea is connected with #8. We are doing too many things in this moment, under fear and stress. This does not make a formula for excellence. Instead, give yourself what psychologists call "radical self-acceptance": accepting everything about yourself, your current situation, and your life without question, blame, or pushback. You cannot fail at this—there's no roadmap, no precedent for this, and we are all truly doing the best we can in an impossible situation.
10. **Limit social media and COVID conversation, especially around children.** One can find tons of information on COVID-19 to consume, and it changes minute to minute. The information is often sensationalized, negatively skewed, and alarmist. Find a few trusted sources that you can check in with consistently, limit it to a few times a day, and set a time limit for yourself on how much you consume (again 30 minutes tops, 2-3 times daily). Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot from children—they see and hear everything, and can become very frightened by what they hear.

Source: Excerpts from [MyWorkplaceHealth](#), Dr. Joti Samra

**Be compassionate with yourself and others and remind yourself, "I'm doing the best I can."**

# Children and back to school

As a family, making decisions about the health, safety and well-being of your children may cause certain emotions to surface, such as fear, stress and anxiety. *This is normal.* Our children will also be experiencing many different emotions during this time of uncertainty; so patience and understanding is a virtue you will need plenty of.

Talk with your child about how the school environment may look different this year (e.g., desks far apart from each other, teachers maintaining physical distance, possibility of staying in the classroom for lunch or virtual learning and new routines at home) and have open, age appropriate and honest conversations with your children about how they are feeling.



Anticipate behavior changes in your child. Watch for changes like excessive crying or irritation, excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, difficulty concentrating, which may be signs that your child is struggling with stress and anxiety.

As a family, staying informed and connected with your child's school may reduce your feelings of anxiety and provide a way for you to express any concerns you may have about your child's school year.

## Mask tips for little ones

1. Label their masks clearly so that they are not confused with those of other children.
2. Ask your child to practice putting on and taking off the mask without touching the cloth.
3. Talk to your child about other people who may not be able to wear masks.
4. Be positive and a good role model when wearing masks, especially when you are in situations where physical distancing is difficult to maintain or impossible.
  - a. Praise your child for wearing a mask correctly.
  - b. Put a mask on stuffed animals.
  - c. Draw a mask on a favorite book character.
  - d. Show images of other children wearing masks.

## Sending your child to school

1. Check in with your child each morning for signs of illness. Not well = no school.
2. Develop a plan with your Supervisor/Manager for when your child is ill and stays home.
3. Be familiar with your school's communication plan if a positive COVID case is identified.
4. If your school uses a cohort model, consider limiting your child's in-person out-of-school interactions to children in the same cohort or to activities where physical distancing can be maintained.

## Remote learning with your child at home

1. Create a schedule with your child and make a commitment to stick with it. A family calendar or other visuals could be useful for keeping track of deadlines and assignments.
2. Reach out to your child's teacher and other relevant school staff if you have concerns about their coping and -ability to keep up with assignments or activities.
3. Ask if the school will offer virtual options to add physical activity to your child's routine.
4. Find a space that's free of distractions, noise, and clutter for learning and homework.
5. Identify opportunities for your child to connect with peers and be social—either virtually or in person, while maintaining physical distance.
6. Ask if there will be regular opportunities for staff and student check-ins and peer-to-peer learning.
7. If you anticipate having technological challenges to learning from home, connect with your school to discuss options for support and assistance.

## You can take time to learn too

1. [Brampton](#), [Caledon](#), and [Mississauga](#) Libraries - eBooks, audiobooks, magazines, newspapers and more.
2. [Class Central](#) – Discover thousands of free online courses from top universities around the world like MIT, Stanford, and Harvard.
3. [Coursera](#) - Build skills with free courses, certificates, and degrees online from world-class universities and companies.
4. [Ted and TedX](#) – watch global and community-based talks and performances.
5. [LinkedIn Learning](#) – courses for every step of your career and more. (30-day free trial, after which fees may apply.) Get started with these 16 Free LinkedIn Learning Courses on helping teams cope with change, tips on how to stay productive, building connectedness while working remote and balancing family/work dynamics.

# And don't forget your financial well-being

As the impact of COVID-19 continues to evolve beyond physical illness, many are faced with economic challenges. As a result, many people are concerned about their financial situation and what options may be available at this point in time. The following are a few items for consideration as you manage your financial health through the pandemic.

1. **Review your financial plan.** If you don't have a plan this is a great time to work on developing one.
2. **Review your budget** or conduct a spending analysis. Look for non-essential expenditures that you can eliminate so that funds can be allocated to other areas in your budget.
3. **Prioritize your spending** on necessities like shelter and food. Consider occupational requirements including connection speeds, as phone and internet access may be additional priorities.
4. **Deal with debt.** List your debts and determine what the minimum monthly payments are to keep debt in good standing. What is the interest rate on each debt? Use this list to help prioritize who gets paid first. Remember the necessities first. If you think you may need to miss some payments, speak with the creditor prior to missing a payment.
5. **Review your investments.** If you are holding your investments, consider if they are suitable given your circumstances. Can you reposition your investments for a potential rebound in the equity markets? If you are early in your career, time is on your side. If you are in the middle of your career, think about the types of investments that are most suitable for you and your risk tolerance as well as the returns needed to reach your goals. If you are later in your career, some hard decisions may be considered about the suitability of your investments and what the market environment means to you and your financial goals.
6. **Consult.** Talk with a skilled financial professional about your situation to gain insight and determine the options for you and your family.
7. **Educate yourself.** Take this time to learn a few things about personal money management. Attend webinars, read books, talk with professionals to educate yourself.



## In closing...

When we are overwhelmed by bad-news stories, it is hard not to feel discouraged. Cultivating and developing a sense of worth, well-being, joy and deep happiness amidst the difficulties of life is still possible. We must aim for compassion, caring, and calmness; every one of us can make choices to stay emotionally healthy.

# add more Gratitude Kindness and Laughter

**Gratitude** - When a person expresses or receives gratitude, dopamine releases, thus making a connection between the behavior and feeling good. The more a person practices gratitude, the more often dopamine releases. Regardless of the role we each play during these challenging times; the health benefits of gratitude are undeniable.

**Kindness** - Kindness is intentional. Stress is often what gets in the way of being kind. It's harder to tap into our sense of caring when mentally we are in survival mode. During these uncertain times where we have little control over what is happening around us in the world, let's increase our levels of happiness by being kind to others and ourselves. Kindness does us good.

**Laughter** - We know that laughter is a powerful force. When we laugh our body releases endorphins and dopamine, nature's feel good chemicals. The result? We can better cope with stress, find hope, and see problems in new ways. During the most difficult of times, a laugh, or even simply a smile, can go a long way toward making you feel better. Laughter is contagious. Just hearing laughter primes your brain and readies you to smile and join in the fun. Laughter really is the best medicine!