



Mental Wellness During COVID-19

For Community

COVID-19 has created a lot of uncertainty and changing circumstances that makes for very difficult times in First Nation communities. We are especially vulnerable with the threat of this virus. It is likely that we may experience some mental distress at some point during this crisis which can take a toll on your mental health. We have a strong history of resilience and strength as First Nations people. Many nations look to take care of self by ensuring all aspects of body, mind, spirit and emotions are attended to for overall health. We have many cultural strengths to draw upon to stay connected and keep well, even while we practice social distancing.

In First Nations culture, we have traditionally supported each other by sharing stress collectively. We often carry the stress of relatives in our bodies, so that they do not need to carry their stresses alone. Through connecting this way, we thrive in the best of times and survive in the worst of times. Sharing stress collectively also means we may experience increased feelings of fear, worry, anger, shame and other challenging emotions.

The following can be of help to you and your family, your community with regards to your Mental Wellness needs:

First Nation Support and Services

Look to your local First Nation Health Department for more information on how they are dealing with this pandemic. First Nations are on high alert at this time and are doing what they can to protect their members. Remember that what they are doing is temporary and at some point, regular activities and services will resume.

Try to stay connected

At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family, by telephone, email, social media, text, or webchat such as Facebook Chat, Skype or other webchat platforms. If you are unable to connect with family or friends but in need of support check to see if resources are available in your community.

Attend to all aspects of your wellness

A balanced look at your wellness can help to get through this time

It can be easy to find yourself spending too much time in front of the television or screen. It is important to seek out a variety of activities to stimulate our mind. Plan for any television or gaming time, setting a limit with your amount of screen time.

- ◇ Think about spending time engaging in other activities such as reading, listening to podcasts or music
- ◇ Plan for time doing something creative, such as drawing, sketching, painting or puzzles.

Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak

Rumor and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control. Some reputable sources might include:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/news>
- <https://www.ctvnews.ca/>

You can get up-to-date information and advice on the virus here:

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/>
- <https://www.afn.ca>

Mind

- ◇ Pick up a new hobby or resume an old hobby you haven't had time for such as beading, sewing, quilting or building
- ◇ Learn a new skills or language. Now is the time to learn your traditional language.
- ◇ Call or reach out to an Elder or a young person every day to check in.
- ◇ Send an email or text to a loved one. Make a video call so people know you are thinking of them.
- ◇ With spring, it's a good time to think about starting an indoor garden.

Physical

- ◇ Prepare healthy meals and snacks and drink plenty of water. If possible, have the necessities available like flour, sugar, canned goods. Incorporate traditional foods of your community as much as possible.
- ◇ Consider ways to manage your budget. Can you budget for any higher bills or expenses? Will you save money from lower transport costs that you can spend elsewhere?
- ◇ If possible, work from home. If not, learn what your rights to payment or benefits are if you need to stay home.
- ◇ Make rest and relaxation a priority. Keep a good sleep/wake routine. Plan for access to your medication, including having a plan to get more when needed.

- ◇ Reorganize any planned therapy or treatments that are not necessary at the moment. If you must access therapy or treatment, reach out to your health practitioner and your local health center to identify a safe way to attend these appointments. Many practitioners are offering virtual/online or phone-based appointments at this time.
- ◇ Ensure you get in some physical activity in your home or outside, if possible. Some local fitness centers are offering free online fitness classes that you might be able to join to work out from home.
- ◇ Spend some time out on the land. There are activities for this season that can be enjoyed such as snowshoeing, hiking, shelter building, harvesting medicines, and fishing as a few examples.

Spirit

- ◇ Get out on the land and connect with nature, if possible harvest traditional medicines and foods.
- ◇ Take time to enjoy the beauty of your surroundings. Enjoy the sunrise or sunset, notice the signs for change of season, welcome the return of animals and plants.
- ◇ Seek wisdom from knowledge keepers and traditional healers – Learn about traditional healing practices and medicines. There are some sites that are streaming online teachings for people of all ages
- ◇ Relearn or practice your traditional language to promote strong spiritual connection to local knowledge, worldview and your culture

- ◇ Participate in cultural activities such as making tobacco ties or smudging to cleanse mind, body, spirit and our environment
- ◇ Boil cedar or make cedar tea as a form of cleansing self and your home.
- ◇ Many of our medicines strengthen and cleanse our bodies and minds. Research traditional medicines and make plans to harvest these if available in your territory *Note that there are no cures for COVID-19 at this time.
- ◇ Many of our knowledge keepers and traditional healers are available online and by telephone.
- ◇ Prioritize your wellness and focus your energy by using prayer, meditation.

Emotional

- ◇ Reach out to family, friends, local mental health supports or helplines to manage your emotions
- ◇ As much as possible, avoid or limit smoking, alcohol and drugs as a way to cope.
- ◇ Embrace this time to spend with your children. Traditionally we taught our children daily about our history, culture, language, and life skills. We learned as families. Use this time to make family memories like doing a family outing, having games night or planning a meal together. Ensure you have support to care for any children or other dependents in the home if you must go to work

- ◇ Plan for any commitments you have that you may need support with. Can someone else help you care for any dependents, walk your dog, or take care of any other commitments?
- ◇ Create a routine or timetable for yourself and anyone else living in your home. It might be necessary to meet as a family or household to plan together how the household will run with everyone at home all day.
- ◇ Check the contact details of the people you see regularly, like their phone numbers or email addresses in case you need to reach someone quickly.

Reach Out!

Here are some helpful numbers if you need to talk or chat.

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
Text CONNECT at 686868

Hope for Wellness Helpline: 1-855-242-3310

Indian Residential School Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

First Peoples Wellness Circle
www.fpwc.ca

Nipissing First Nation, 857 Yellek Trail North Bay, ON P1B 8G5
Tele: (705) 313-4942 Toll Free: 1-833-311-fpwc