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March 18, 2020

Dear Prairie Spirit families:

Thank you for your support and understanding as we navigate this unprecedented situation with COVID-19 and the indefinite suspension of classes effective **Friday, March 20**. I have no doubt that this has been an emotional and uncertain week for you and your family. The abrupt end to classes has been difficult for both students and staff.

Classes will be suspended at the end of the school day tomorrow, **Thursday, March 19**. Thank you for keeping your child at home as we transition to a full suspension of classes. Contact your school as soon as possible if you have questions and if you need to update your contact information.

At the direction of the Ministry of Education, educational operations in the province will pause for a one-week period, from **Friday, March 20 to Friday, March 27**. As a result, Prairie Spirit activated the Division's Education Continuity Plan, which will oversee essential business services while other aspects of the Division are paused. We are working with the Ministry to determine what school operations will look like across the province in the future.

Students will not be receiving learning resources during this pause period as we seek clarity from the Ministry and plan for a distance learning model. During this first phase of class suspensions, the Ministry of Education will be developing guidelines and expectations for ongoing student learning. We will be communicating plans as they are finalized.

We know there are many questions about high school marks and credits, as well as graduation requirements. We expect to have more information from the Ministry in the coming weeks. We are confident that decisions will support students and their ongoing learning and future plans.

Schools will be in contact with their students and families as plans develop. Prairie Spirit will also share updates through our website ([www.spiritsd.ca](http://www.spiritsd.ca)) and through social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). We are committed to ongoing communication with Prairie Spirit families.

Thank you again for all your work and support in this effort. Please take good care of yourselves and one another. The following ideas may help in the coming days and weeks:

- **Practice self-compassion:** Even those who do not typically struggle with anxiety may experience increased anxiety during uncertain times, so don't be hard on yourself if you are feeling more worried or anxious than usual.
- **Practice self-care:** It is important to engage in healthy and relaxing activities that you enjoy. Consider a wide variety of fun, intellectually stimulating and physically active options such

as reading for professional growth or leisure, cooking, practicing yoga, exercise, meditation and spending time in nature.

- **Stay connected:** Stay connected with family and friends.
- **Establish and maintain routines:** Keep similar routines and develop healthy new routines to help provide predictability and a sense of safety for you and your family.
- **Be kind:** This is a very unsettling and uncertain time for everyone. Keep this in mind in your interactions and extend grace.

I am attaching a resource document created by our school counsellors to guide you in your discussions with your children regarding COVID-19 during this unsettled time. We know that we are all doing our best to navigate uncharted waters in the wake of the COVID-19 response. We hope that the information will give guidance and direction in supporting our children and youth as we all work through this together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Jeschke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lori Jeschke  
Director of Education

## PARENT RESOURCES

Parent/Caregiver Guide: Helping to Cope with Coronavirus/ COVID-19	<a href="#">Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (PDF ,144KB)</a>	This resource provides information for parents and caregivers about outbreaks, how they can prepare to reduce stress and anxiety, how it may affect your family both physically and emotionally and ways to cope.
Talking to Children about COVID-19	<a href="#">Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource</a>	A resource for parents on how best to talk to children about the coronavirus.
Talking to Teens and Tweens about COVID-19	<a href="#">Talking to Teens and Tweens about Coronavirus</a>	This article details advice from experts on how parents can help teens be prepared and have the right information about the coronavirus.
Talking to your child about COVID-19	<a href="#">Childmind- Talking to children about Coronavirus</a>	How to have calming conversations about COVID-19
Ten Percent Happier	<a href="#">Anxiety and Coronavirus</a>	Helping parents and children/youth navigate anxiety with coronavirus

## SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social Distancing at Home	<a href="#">Things to do</a>	Things to do at home with children
Social Distancing	<a href="#">Saskatoon Rationale for Social Distancing</a>	A perspective on why we need to socially distance ourselves at a Saskatoon level.

## HAND WASHING

CDC- Hand Washing Tips	<a href="#">Hand Washing</a>	This is a hand washing resource for parents to refer to.
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## SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES

Example of Daily Schedule	<a href="#">Daily Schedule</a>	An example of what a routine could look like at home. Keeping kids on a schedule allows for a sense of security and calm. Structure and Routine help children to feel safe and to be able to predict what is happening. It provides a sense of control of the environment.
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## RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

A Child-Friendly way to read about COVID-19	<a href="#">Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus</a>	A resource for children about coronavirus, what it is and how to protect oneself.
Teachers Pay Teachers—Coping Strategies	<a href="#">100 FREE Coping Strategies</a>	Here is a list of 100 coping strategies that may be helpful! While your child is at home, practice these different coping strategies! You don't have to use the term "coping strategy," rather you can just frame it as doing something fun. This is from Teachers pay Teachers NOTE: You may need to create an account to access the free downloadable material

## ANXIETY

### Common Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety in Children

Anxiety in children can present differently than in adults. Children may:

- Become clingy, and not like changes.
- Show anger and have tantrums.
- Use behaviors to try & control the situation.
- Can be irritable, cranky or in a bad mood.
- Worry a lot or have many fears.
- Complain of tiredness or having trouble sleeping.
- Have body symptoms such as headache, stomachaches, or other somatic complaints.
- Can be restless and have difficulty concentrating (can be confused with ADD/ADHD)
- Anxiety can affect schooling; for example, the child may not talk in class, have trouble in groups or excessive worry about their schoolwork.
- Anxiety can affect how the child does socially; for example, the child may have trouble making new friends, or attending birthday parties and sleepovers.
- Anxiety symptoms are often not evident to outsiders – some children keep their anxiety inside.
- About 20% of children & adolescents will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder at some time in their lives.
- Anxiety can seem to get better on its own; it comes and goes.

### Common Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety in Youth

- The following are eleven common signs of anxiety in youth:
- Consistent or persistent worry about school, friends, following rules, or approval of teachers and parents
- Complaints of physical problems with no physical cause
- Problems sleeping (falling asleep, waking up throughout the night, or waking up early)
- Being overly critical of themselves, or doubting their abilities – low self-esteem
- Continually checking & rechecking schoolwork and other chores to make sure it is done correctly; tendency to seek self-perfection
- Avoidance of social activities, withdrawal from friends, or not wanting to go to school
- Individuals diagnosed with ADHD or depression may experience symptoms of anxiety
- Inability to stop the worry despite reassurances from school personnel and parents

- Irritability, mood swings, or experimentation with alcohol and drugs (self-medicating)
- Acting out against authority
- Self-injury may be used to regulate mood in individuals suffering from anxiety

### Strategies for Helping Your Child with Anxiety

- Monitor your own anxiety. Try to be a calming presence for your child.
- Acknowledge that the worry is real. Being able to talk about it can take some of the power out of it.
- Teach coping strategies:
  - Relaxation techniques (daily)
  - Positive self-talk
  - Focus on strengths & interests
- The key to resolving anxieties is to face them in a supportive and gentle manner. Work on positive solutions that approach the fear rather than avoid it. Avoidance reinforces that the anxiety is legitimate and keeps it going.
- Set reasonable, achievable goals.
- Healthy sleeping, eating and exercise.
- Patience, patience, patience!
- Have a sense of humor with your child.
- Praise achievements (big or small)!
- Reduce exposure to anxiety provoking media.
- Model the behaviours you want to encourage (asking for help, relaxing, positive outlook on life, laughing at ourselves, facing challenges etc.)
- Believe in your child and their ability to master the anxiety.

### Questions Parents can ask themselves

- Are your child’s fears and behaviors typical for their age?
- What are their symptoms? Do they affect your child’s personal, academic and social well-being?
- Does the fear seem blown out of proportion? Is it an appropriate fear for the situation?
- Is there a pattern with their behaviour that has lasted several months?
- How is your own anxiety?
- What kind of supports do you have? Family, friends, community, school, church etc.

#### Remember:

Exposure to uncomfortable and anxiety provoking situations is a fact of life in the normal development of children and youth. Facing and dealing with anxiety provides young people with the opportunity to develop coping strategies and a sense of their own competence. In other words, to become resilient.

Anxiety and the Corona Virus	<a href="#">Just for Kids: A Comic-Way of addressing Anxiety</a>	Here’s some great information if your child is feeling anxious about Coronavirus. This is a comic that provides great information to kids
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Whole Child Counselling	<a href="#">Resources for Children and Parents</a>	Coronavirus resources for kids, parents, and educators. How can you help your child manage the anxiety they may be feeling.
Mindshift App	<a href="#">App for Parents and Children</a>	Is anxiety getting in the way of your life? MindShift™ CBT uses scientifically proven strategies based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help you learn to relax and be mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.
Ten Percent Happier	<a href="#">Anxiety and Coronavirus</a>	Helping parents and children/youth navigate anxiety with coronavirus

## DEPRESSION

Depression in youth is a serious mental health problem that results in persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in activities. The signs and symptoms include a change from the teenager's previous attitude and behavior that can cause significant problems at school or home, in social activities, or in other parts of their life. If depression signs and symptoms continue, begin to interfere in your child's life, or cause you to have concerns about suicide or their safety, talk to a doctor or a mental health professional. Your teen's family doctor or school is a good place to start. Depression isn't a weakness that can be overcome with willpower — it can have serious consequences and requires treatment. For most youth, depression symptoms ease with treatment such as medication and counseling.

### Signs of Depression in Youth

Symptoms can vary depending on the individual. Be alert for possible emotional and behavioural changes, such as:

- Feelings of sadness, which can include crying spells for no apparent reason
- Frustration or feelings of anger, even over small matters
- Feeling hopeless or empty
- Irritable or annoyed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Ongoing sense that life and the future are grim and bleak
- Tiredness and loss of energy, insomnia or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite — decreased appetite, weight loss, or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Agitation or restlessness — for example, pacing, an inability to sit still
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Frequent complaints of unexplained body aches and headaches

- Social isolation
- Poor school performance or frequent absences from school
- Less attention to personal hygiene or appearance
- Angry outbursts, disruptive or risky behavior, or other acting-out behaviors
- Self-harm — for example, cutting, burning, or excessive piercing or tattooing
- Frequent thoughts of death, dying or suicide or making a suicide plan or a suicide attempt

## MANAGING STRESS

### Healthy Approaches to Stress

- Understand the Stress Response (Why do I feel like I do?), its purpose and its various levels
- Interpret the stress response as positive, not negative. See it as a challenge to be faced. A problem to be solved.
- Identify the problem that needs to be solved. Seek solutions. Seek assistance and help of others.
- Grounding, breathing “centering” techniques
- Don’t turn in – reach out-Talk about your feelings
- DO NOT AVOID

### Unhealthy Ways of Coping

- Withdrawing from people
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Smoking
- Using drugs to relax
- Excessive sleep
- Taking out one’s stress on others (lashing out, anger, outburst)
- Self harm

### Pay Attention To

1. **Sleep** - A sleepless night increases stress levels. Deep sleep helps the brain clean out toxins (Lewis, 2019)
2. **Diet: Eat healthy** - Eating more fruits and vegetables improves emotional well-being (Samaraweera, et al, 2014)
3. **Exercise** - Triggers the growth of new brain cells

### Do the Ordinary Things

As mundane as life can get at times, it is important to remember to attend to the ordinary.

Recall that stress and control are related. When we feel stress, it is typically a result of a lack of control over something in our life. Taking time to do some of the ordinary things helps us to take control. Also recall that one does not always have to get control over the thing that is stressing us out. We just need to get control over something, so choose the things you can control (diet, sleep, exercise, hobbies, etc...).

### What Kids Know

- Stress is uncomfortable
- Must relieve – they develop strategies *to avoid*. For example, play a game on their phone; don’t show up, drug or alcohol use, etc... Some of these avoidance strategies are not positive.

## What Kids Must Know

1. Interpret Stress Response (Why do I feel like I do?), as **positive** and not negative.  
See it as a challenge to be faced, and a problem to be solved

2. Key is to **identify the factors causing the stress** (this is very difficult for the developing brain) and to use it to our advantage and not to immediately respond by trying to avoid or relieve it.

## In the Moment Stress Relievers

- Breathe
- Move your body
- Write it down, make a list
- Laugh
- Ask, "On a scale of 1-10, how much will this matter in 1 week?"
- Practice Positive Self Talk
- Prayer
- Smile