

## COVID-19 and teenagers: Supporting Youth Mental Wellness

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With all the changes and uncertainty going on in our world right now, high school students have a particularly rough road. Why is that?

- Because your brains are still developing.
- Because your hormones are all over the place with puberty.
- Because you can't hang out with your friends, and friends are really important to you, especially at this stage in life.
- Or, you don't have a lot of friends, and physical distancing makes the loneliness even worse.
- Because you still have homework, but classes are online or by phone.
- Or, just because you're stuck at home all the time with your parents or caregivers and siblings. What teenager deserves that?

### Does this sound like you?

- I don't care about things like my future or my goals.
- I feel bored and restless all the time.
- I can't get motivated to do my homework, I get distracted.
- I keep fighting with my parents and my brother and sister.
- I don't feel like doing anything I normally love doing.
- One minute I'm happy, the next I want to go in my room and shut the door.
- I could sleep forever. But sometimes it's hard to sleep.
- Part of me is freaking out. I feel angry. I feel sad. I feel scared.



Life can feel really different and strange at this time without our regular ways of being and doing together.

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## Here's why you may feel different these days—and how to make it better

**The way you are feeling is normal in these NOT normal times.**

- The COVID-19 pandemic is causing unpredictable stress on everyone.
- You are not alone, it's not you, and how you feel is not your fault.
- People across the entire world- including your parents, caregivers and teachers- are feeling the same way.

**The pandemic will not last forever but we must still practice safety.**

- COVID-19 is temporary and it will subside.
- We are opening up slowly, but we still must be careful and continue to practice safety measures.
- Physical distancing helps reduce risks to yourself, and many others who may need the medical support of respirators, hospitals, and frontline staff.
- No matter what age we are, doing our part to keep our distance from others and stay well makes resources available for those that will require it for life or death situations.

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## COVID-19, stress and your brain

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, stress is high for everyone. Why?**

- We can't hang out with our friends or do the things that help us feel normal, or help us get back to feeling normal quickly.
- There have been a LOT of disappointments for Yukon teens. Everything from school trips to graduation ceremonies were cancelled or postponed.
- We don't know when "normal" is going to come back.

**What is stress and the stress response?**

- Like all animals, humans are hard-wired to respond to stress- which your brain reads as "Danger!"
- When your brain senses danger, your body instantly responds before you can even think about it.
- You either run away, stay and fight, or freeze in place.
- We call this "flight, fight or freeze," or the stress response.
- The stress response is meant to immediately remove us from danger – which should take a few seconds or up to 30 minutes.



## So, what is different with the stress from the pandemic?

The problem with the pandemic is this: it is a big, unclear threat that we can't control. But we feel it. And, it never really goes away.

### **With prolonged stress from COVID-19, the stress response can get stuck on HIGH ALERT.**

Our brains and our bodies stay ready to respond and adapt to the crisis at hand.



Many of us are stuck in **flight or fight mode** at this time. We are like a bunch of basketball players: knees bent, breathing hard, dribbling the ball, looking around quickly, not sure where to pass it next.

This makes it hard to relax or settle in to homework!

Others are stuck in **freeze mode**. This can show up as wanting to curl into a ball to protect yourself, like a hedgehog.

This is why you might feel numb, sleep a lot or don't care about much right now.



**This document will show you things you can do on your own to learn to understand and manage your stress response.**

**But there are times when you will not be able to do it alone.** It is normal to need help at different times and in different ways in order to get our stress levels down again to a level we can manage.

This document also provides the names and contact information for people to talk to and other resources to help you feel better during these stressful times.

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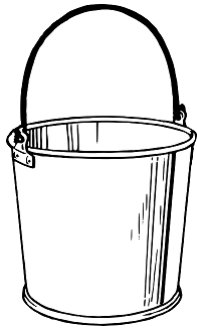
## **Everyone has their own, unique response to stress**

For each person, stress is a unique and personal response that differs in:

- what we find stressful
- what we can handle
- when we can handle it

- what “too many” stressors are
- how we respond to life situations.

**Stress accumulates.** When too many things get piled on us at once, or over a period of time, we literally get “full,” and can’t handle the stress as well. You can think of it as having personal “stress bucket.”



**What does a “normal” level of stress in my stress bucket look like?**

When your stress bucket is manageable, you:

- feel in control
- you get stuff done
- you show up at school and for your friends and family
- you laugh and feel happy regularly.

**When your stress bucket gets too full, your stress response can get stuck on high alert.**

Here are some signs that your stress bucket is full:



- You feel numb
- You don’t care
- You are smoking or drinking alcohol
- You feel fuzzy and unfocused
- You can’t sleep
- You feel moody, angry or tearful
- Life is totally overwhelming
- Changes in appetite - either up or down.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has filled up most of our stress buckets.**

Sometimes people turn to addictions, substances or self-harm to help deal with difficult feelings that come from stress. Unfortunately, these choices may cover up what is bothering you, but they won’t help you change it. This can lead to worse results in your life, less control, more frustration and poor health.

**Managing your own stress response is a learned skill.**

When you find ways or find support to help you bring your stress level down, your brain and your body can finally relax – and you can feel better, no matter what is happening in the world around you.

## Healthy ways to empty your stress bucket daily

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### 1) Watch your thoughts and follow the facts and the science

- Remind yourself this is NOT the “end of the world.” We WILL get back to normal.
- In Canada, we have many health professionals who have studied how to prepare for a pandemic, and we are following their instructions.
- Our Chief Medical Officer of Health is guiding Yukoners based on the best science available.
- Our Premier and government are working to ensure our economy stays strong, and that food and supplies will continue to arrive here.

**Even in a pandemic, we are relatively safe because we are all doing the things that keep us safe:**

- practicing physical distancing
- washing our hands
- taking care of our physical, mental and emotional health.

### 2) Discharge excess stress from your body

If you’ve ever rubbed your sock feet on a rug then touched someone, you know that a “shock” is created. This is static electrical energy. A charge builds up and is released.

- In the same way, when our stress bucket fills up, our bodies literally get charged with stressful, emotional energy that may feel like anxiety or tension.
- We need to let this buildup of stressful energy out of our bodies every day.
- This process is called **discharging** the energy or stress.

**Here are some ways to discharge emotional stress through simple physical actions:**

- Wash your hands after an emotional conversation with someone.
- Take a deep breath in. Let your stomach rise. Hold it as you count to three. Let it out slowly. Repeat.
- Stick your left elbow on your right knee and breathe out sharply, or make a “HA” sound – then do the right elbow to the left knee and make a sound/breath out, hard. Do this a few times on each side. You will feel much stronger, clearer in



your head and more grounded and relaxed. This exercise is called [cross-crawls](#), with breathing and sound added. Try it lying down, too.

- Go for a walk, a run or dance around. Exercise is a great way to discharge stress.

### 3) Connect with Nature

“Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;... let nature be your teacher.”

-from the poem [The Tables Turned](#)<sup>ii</sup> by William Wordsworth, written in 1798

**Nature helps us naturally discharge stress and removes it from our physical bodies.**

- **Go out on the land.** Observe nature. Birds, animals, rivers, lakes, trees, swans. The sky, the air, the weather. Feeling alive and peaceful comes from connecting with the land.



- **Get outside every single day even for 15-20 minutes.** Move your body in the fresh air. Garden, skip, go for a walk, run or bike ride. Play with the dog or a sibling in the yard or the neighbourhood (but remember to safely space from kids who don't live with you!)
- Sleep with your window open a little or a lot, every night.
- Tend to houseplants and your pets. Water them, feed them, pat them, even talk to them.



### 4) Daily routines and rituals

- **Sleep.** A lot. Since you don't have to get up early for school, sleep in. Take naps. Go to bed early. [Teenagers need more sleep at the best of times](#)<sup>iii</sup>.
  - Sleep will help you stay grounded and process extra stress.
  - We also repair our immune systems while we are asleep. This helps us fight off infections or viruses.

- **Eat balanced meals.** This means, protein, vegetables and healthy starches. Don't skip meals, eat regularly. Limit sugar and junk food.
  - See if you can get your family to sit down to meals together.
  - It's also a great time to learn to cook. Cooking can be very relaxing and creative.



**Drink lots of water.** Bubbly, filtered or tap water. Limit other types of beverages. Pop is high in sugar and can impact your mood and your weight. Coffee and other caffeine products can make you even more jittery. Alcohol is a depressant – even one alcoholic drink can make you feel less energetic the next day. Not to mention, until you're 19, alcohol consumption is illegal.

- Hydration also helps you feel less moody and more energized. Think of a plant that droops when you forget to water it. [Your body is 45-75% water<sup>iv</sup>](#), so you will perk up, too, like a plant, when you get “watered.”

### Small daily actions that will help you reduce stress:

- **Journaling**- write down your private thoughts about what happened in your day and how you feel. Try this when you wake up, too: before you get out of bed, write out three “morning pages” of whatever comes to mind. You will be amazed at how much better your day goes.
- **Play** an instrument and sing, or write some music.
- **Hang out** with a pet, a parent, or a sibling. Play board games.
- **Do something** physical and creative- woodworking, work on your car, draw, paint, cook breakfast for the family.



- **Gratitude** – each day, write 20 things down you are grateful for, or say them out loud to yourself.
  - Write them on post it notes and stick them around your room, your bathroom, your house- to remind yourself of things you are thankful for, no matter how small.
  - This may surprise you, but practicing gratitude daily is [scientifically proven to reduce stress<sup>v</sup>](#) better than almost anything else!

## 5) Think about quitting

If you smoke tobacco or cannabis or use vaping products, it is a good time to find other ways to cope with your stress.

- Vaping and smoking tobacco or cannabis causes lung damage and other respiratory health problems.
- These activities increase the risk of developing severe COVID-19 complications.
- Cannabis can also cause [additional mental health issues](#)<sup>vi</sup> in teens, due to how your brain is developing.

For more resources and tools for quitting cigarettes, cannabis or vaping, contact [Quitpath.ca](https://quitpath.ca).

- In Whitehorse 867-667-8393
- In Yukon, Toll Free 1-866-221-8393

## 6) Don't think you have to push through this on your own

If you feel like your stress bucket is too full and you:

- just can't shake the stress off or feel normal again;
- can't control your emotions, you're crying or moody or angry;
- can't eat or can't sleep - or want to eat and/or sleep all the time;
- these are some of the signs that it's time to reach out for some help.

**Support comes in lots of forms.** Talking, attending a group activity, or getting some help to find what you need to take care of yourself, whether it is a safe place to stay, or help with schoolwork. There are many services and people dedicated to being there for Yukon teenagers.

Remember, there is NO shame in asking for support and getting help when you need a boost.





## Where to find more information and supports for youth

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### Youth outreach workers

Youth outreach workers provide counselling, resources and system navigation to youth.

**Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSU)** offers rapid access counselling services to students in Yukon communities and Whitehorse.

- Daily slots available for Yukoners of all ages across the territory.
- No previous connection with this office necessary.
- Simply phone your local office to schedule an appointment with a counsellor.
- **Or, call our central line free of charge 1-866-456-3838.**

**For students in Yukon communities – call the outreach worker in your community at the number below or call the toll-free central phone line.**

**Carcross:** (867) 332-3157

**Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, Ross River and Faro:** (867) 332-5468

**Haines Junction, Destruction Bay, Burwash Landing and Beaver Creek:**  
(867) 334-5688

**Dawson City, Mayo, and Old Crow:** (867) 993-4300

**Teslin:** (867) 332-4088

**Watson Lake:** (867) 536-3222

**Phone toll-free in the communities:** 1-866-456-3838

**For students in Whitehorse- reach out to your school-based outreach worker or call the MWSU main office.**

For Vanier Catholic Secondary and Teen Parent Centre contact:

[Veronica.proulx@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Veronica.proulx@gov.yk.ca) (867) 332-5999

For FH Collins Secondary and Gadzoosdaa Student Residence contact:

[Jasmine.rosentreter@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Jasmine.rosentreter@gov.yk.ca) (867) 689-0804

For Porter Creek Secondary and Individual Learning Centre contact:

[Sheena.reidy@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Sheena.reidy@gov.yk.ca) (867) 332-6091

**Or, call our office in Whitehorse:** MWSU main desk: (867) 456-3838

## Additional Youth Supports

If you experience sexual assault or sexualized violence the Sexualized Assault Response Team (SART) provides integrated services from different agencies.

- Phone SART at 1-844-967-7275 from anywhere in the territory
- Talk to a trained professional confidentially and anonymously about your options, what to do next and to get support.
- Supports include help with navigating processes, hospital services, reporting to RCMP, the support line and mental health services.

### Emergency Youth Shelter

- Call 867-633-7699 for access.
- The Youth Shelter is OPEN 24/7.
- For youth age 17 to 23 years old who need a safe bed, or some help in reconnecting with family, friends and/or the community.

### Yukon Child and Youth Advocate

- Call 867-456-5575
- They will help you to advocate for access to a variety of things for youth.
- For example, financial supports, housing, access to safety, counselling.

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## Free phone line to talk to someone privately - any time

Kids Help Phone Line [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

Looking for support? You are never alone. Kids Help Phone is always here to listen.

- Canada's only national 24/7 bilingual support for youth, free and private.

Call 1-800-686-6868 or text TALK to 686868 to speak to someone.



## Youth organizations in Yukon

### BYTE

[yukonyouth.com](http://yukonyouth.com)

Call (867) to 667-7975



- **Zoom Drop-In for youth.** BYTE has partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Yukon to host this fun weekly event with activities and challenges.
  - every Tuesday from 3-5pm
  - for the login information: contact Asad at [manager@yukonyouth.com](mailto:manager@yukonyouth.com), Oliver at [obulpitt@bgcyukon.com](mailto:obulpitt@bgcyukon.com) or just comment on our social media.
- **Healthy Relationships, Healthy Minds and Safer Partying** workbook series
  - Explores values, gets youth and caregivers working together and talking
  - Available through the website and social media. [yukonyouth.com](http://yukonyouth.com)
- **Office hours 9am-5pm daily.** BYTE staff are available by phone to talk to any youth, caregivers, support workers, or other adults. They offer help navigating any services or with recommendations for programming.

### Boys & Girls Clubs of Yukon

[bgcyukon.com](http://bgcyukon.com)



Boys & Girls Clubs  
of Yukon

- Call or email to find out about online cooking courses and more.
- Telephone (867) 393-2824
- Email: [ed@bgcyukon.com](mailto:ed@bgcyukon.com)

### Council of Yukon First Nations

[cyfn.ca/covid-19](http://cyfn.ca/covid-19)

(867) 393-9200

CYFN offers resources and support for Yukon youth. Please call their office or check the website for health information, [local videos](#), downloadable posters, and more.



## Websites and videos to check out

Youth mental health resources hub: [jack.org/covid](http://jack.org/covid).

- A place to find information to help you take care of yourself and look out for the people you love during this challenging time.

Hope for indigenous youth: [wemattercampaign.org](http://wemattercampaign.org)

- We Matter is a place to help indigenous youth get through hard times, whether you need support yourself or want to support someone you know. Check out the great videos on their home page.

[Anxiety Canada](#): videos and resources for teens on the brain & stress:

- [anxietycanada.com/covid-19/](http://anxietycanada.com/covid-19/)
- [How anxiety and stress works with the brain](https://youtu.be/rpolpKTWrp4) [youtu.be/rpolpKTWrp4](https://youtu.be/rpolpKTWrp4)

[MissionHealth.org](#): [6 tips for coping with the Stress of Covid-19](#)

[blog.mission-health.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/03/COVID-19\\_6-Tips-for-Coping-with-the-Stress\\_FINAL.pdf](http://blog.mission-health.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/03/COVID-19_6-Tips-for-Coping-with-the-Stress_FINAL.pdf)

[Infographics/Comics exploring Corona virus and staying safe](#)

[mprnews.org/story/2020/02/28/npr-just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR2TCjWrfk7jefyX6rMPAoK0\\_1ugp0zvHkeJgtrIFeXKzHNuMv51heAfxsE](http://mprnews.org/story/2020/02/28/npr-just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR2TCjWrfk7jefyX6rMPAoK0_1ugp0zvHkeJgtrIFeXKzHNuMv51heAfxsE)

[PBS \(Public Television in United States\)](#)

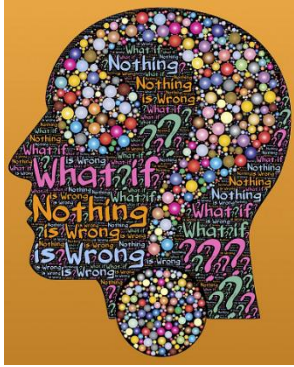
- Great video series on Covid-19 and teens talking about stress and coping.
  - [Everything's Canceled: Coping Tips Straight from a Psychologist](#)  
<https://youtu.be/cT77fQ57IP4>
  - [Coronavirus: Why Social Distancing Saves Lives](#)  
<https://youtu.be/uxHEUzmJRMU>

[Childmind Organization](#): [How to do Belly breathing](#)

[childmind.org/article/anxious-stomach-aches-and-headaches/](http://childmind.org/article/anxious-stomach-aches-and-headaches/)



## For teachers, parents, caregivers and other adults



Childmind.org [Supporting teenagers and young adults during the coronavirus](https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/)

<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

[Neurosequential network videos](https://www.neurosequential.com/covid-19-resources) on COVID-19 and stress response <https://www.neurosequential.com/covid-19-resources>

- [Dr. Bruce Perry discusses why you should not be afraid of stress](#)

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## Additional government resources

- Yukon information on COVID-19: [Yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca)
- [Additional supports for Yukoners](#)
- Canada information on COVID-19: [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus)
- Department of Education. If you have questions we have not answered, please e-mail [publicschools@gov.yk.ca](mailto:publicschools@gov.yk.ca).

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## End notes: Long form URLs

<sup>i</sup> Cross Crawls: [precisionchirofl.com/blog/cross-crawl-exercises-neurological-disorganization-this-is-a-good-thing/](https://precisionchirofl.com/blog/cross-crawl-exercises-neurological-disorganization-this-is-a-good-thing/)

<sup>ii</sup> William Wordsworth, The Tables Turned: [poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned)

<sup>iii</sup> Teens need sleep: [https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/teens\\_and\\_sleep](https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/teens_and_sleep)

<sup>iv</sup> Your body is 45-75% water: [thoughtco.com/how-much-of-your-body-is-water-609406](https://www.thoughtco.com/how-much-of-your-body-is-water-609406)

<sup>v</sup> The Science of stress: [verywellmind.com/the-benefits-of-gratitude-for-stress-relief-3144867](https://www.verywellmind.com/the-benefits-of-gratitude-for-stress-relief-3144867)

<sup>vi</sup> Cannabis: [yukon.ca/en/your-government/find-out-what-government-doing/learn-about-cannabis#health-risks-associated-with-cannabis](https://www.yukon.ca/en/your-government/find-out-what-government-doing/learn-about-cannabis#health-risks-associated-with-cannabis)