

Background- Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental and Emotional Well-being of Children

Although young children appear to be less vulnerable to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the impact of the pandemic can be devastating to their emotional and mental well-being.¹ These current times are causing feelings of uncertainty, fearfulness and isolation due to home confinement and the disruption in their education, leisure activities and socialization.² The lack of structure or the disruption in routine causes boredom and lack of innovative ideas for engaging in educational settings and extracurricular activities.² The mental and emotional effects of the pandemic vary across age groups, with intensified consequences for children that have pre-existing mental health conditions or traumatic experiences.³ While severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors are extreme responses to the pandemic, the ramifications of the pandemic should not be taken lightly.³ These negative impacts on

¹ de Figueiredo, Camila Saggiaro, Poliana Capucho Sandre, Liana Catarina Lima Portugal, Thalita Mázala-de-Oliveira, Luana da Silva Chagas, Ícaro Raony, Elenn Soares Ferreira, Elizabeth Giestal-de-Araujo, Aline Araujo Dos Santos, and Priscilla Oliveira-Silva Bomfim. "COVID-19 pandemic impact on children and adolescents' mental health: Biological, environmental, and social factors." *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry* (2020): 110171.

² Singh, Shweta, Miss Deblina Roy, Clinical Psychology Trainee Miss Kritika Sinha, Clinical Psychology Trainee Miss Sheeba Parveen, Clinical Psychology Trainee Ginni Sharma, and Clinical Psychology Trainee Gunjan Joshi. "Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review with recommendations." *Psychiatry research* (2020): 113429.

³ "Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting from COVID-19," National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), accessed December 18, 2020, <https://www.naspoline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>.

the mental health of children cannot be ignored as they may have long term consequences in the psychological development of children.

Studies have been found that children who don't understand why they have to take quarantine measures, such as social distancing from friends and family, have more anxiety.⁴ Given this, it is important that they are exposed to fact-based information and resources tailored for children so that they can easily understand COVID-19 and the quarantine measures in place.⁵ Recommendations to promote mental health in children during the COVID-19 pandemic for parents include: spending more time with kids, educating them about COVID-19, reducing exposure to tabloid news, modeling appropriate preventive measures and coping mechanisms, having a consistent routine in place, and focusing on good behavior through praise and social reinforcements.² Recommendations for teachers include educating about COVID-19, conducting creative and engaging online lessons, promoting mental health in students, making children understand the importance of human virtues such as empathy and patience, and interacting with parents to provide feedback about children's behavior and mental health.²

⁴ Shah, Kaushal, Shivraj Mann, Romil Singh, Rahul Bangar, and Ritu Kulkarni. "Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents." *Cureus* 12, no. 8 (2020).

⁵ Dalton, Louise, Elizabeth Rapa, and Alan Stein. "Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19." *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 4, no. 5 (2020): 346-347.

Additionally, parents, guardians, and teachers should communicate with children about how they are processing information in addition to the changes in their normal lifestyles to provide them with the emotional tools they will need to get through this period. Harvard Health suggests to be truthful, show your emotions, talk about COVID-19 helpers such as health professionals, build check-in times into daily routine, and encourage them to ask questions for you to address.⁶ Acknowledging children's emotions, helping them cope and providing them with the tools to regulate their own emotions are important for their mental and emotional well-being.⁴

Considering that health is not just the absence of disease and that mental well-being also constitutes health, we have created a children's book addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental and emotional well-being. We have included at the end of the book, a list of sources parents can consult to teach their children about COVID-19 and have also created an infographic, available on our website, that serves as a guide for talking with children about the current pandemic. We hope that this project will promote our mission to "make health information easily accessible and digestible to children in the local community of Brunswick in an effort to promote compassion and engagement with health in the future generation of leaders."

⁶ McCarthy, Claire. "How to Talk to Children about the Serious Illness of a Loved One." Harvard Health Blog, January 14, 2020. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-serious-illness-of-a-loved-one-2019120218468>.