



# Advisory

- Parents and Families
- Principals and Teachers
- Students



## During COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

The escalating spread of COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented changes in the lives of all people including children, adolescents and youth causing substantial concerns in the personal and social lives. Not only has this pandemic been a serious medical concern but it has also brought with it emotional and psychosocial stressors for all which have led to emergence of mental health concerns, especially amongst children, adolescents and youth.

Children and adolescents are more vulnerable than adults and may have experienced heightened level of stress, anxiety and fearfulness, along with a range of other emotional and behavioral issues. Not only did they experience unanticipated and sudden changes in their everyday life functioning, but have also been living continuously with several fears and worries related to their academic, personal and social life. All these concerns require to be addressed by all stakeholders. An empathetic and calm approach of teachers as well as family members can go a long way in helping children, adolescents and youth deal effectively with their mental, emotional and behavioural issues.

COVID-19 has also brought new stressors on teachers, parents and caregivers such as getting past a trauma/loss/grief. Parents may feel afraid to send children to school for the fear of getting infected with COVID, etc. This can hamper their capacity to provide adequate support, be effective role models and remain positively engaged with their children.

As the schools are now reopening after a long period of online functioning due to the pandemic, it will require adapting and adjusting as well as adequate preparation for this transition phase. The pressure on schools is now on balancing the emotional, educational and social needs of students along with taking care of health and safety of students and staff. Parents too may also be concerned about their children's physical and emotional safety as they go to school. In this transition students also may be experiencing mixed feelings- excitement of going back to school, meeting with friends etc. on one hand and stress of having to adapt to offline mode of classes and following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for COVID on the other. One aspect is certain that the pandemic has left a profound impact on the mental and emotional well-being of students, families and all school stakeholders (heads, teachers and staff etc.) across the country.

**‘Manodarpan’**, an initiative of the Ministry of Education (MoE), is providing psychosocial support to children, adolescents and youth across the country as well as their significant caregivers (i.e. parents and teachers) in a comprehensive and multimodal manner with the help of personnel working in the field of psychology and counselling. A national toll-free tele-helpline (8448440632) has been set-up for a country-wide outreach to students from schools, colleges and universities. It provides tele-counselling services to the callers seeking help/guidance on mental health and other psychosocial issues. Since, parents and teachers play a crucial role in creating and maintaining a conducive environment, both at home and school respectively, it is crucial for them to be optimistic and have positive attitude. A few suggestions and practical tips for parents, teachers and students are given to facilitate this phase of transition.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES**

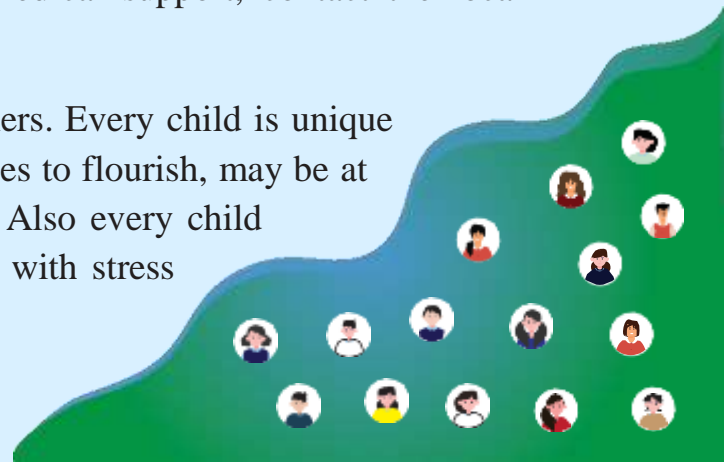
### **Be Updated and Provide Age-appropriate Information**

- ❖ Discuss facts and information updates about COVID-19 based on authentic sources. Sharing of facts will help in reducing fear, clearing doubts and thus reduce beliefs based on myths and rumours.
- ❖ Highlight the importance of wearing masks, hand wash, maintaining physical distance in places such as playground, assembly hall, auditorium, library, etc. when in school premises as well as when travelling to and fro from school, also encourage other hygienic practices, respiratory etiquettes like the use of handkerchief/tissue paper over mouth while coughing / sneezing, or using the sleeve of shirt covering upper arm.
- ❖ Find opportunities for sharing positive and hopeful stories and images of local people who have successfully recovered from COVID-19 and those who have provided support during such times.



## Be Supportive

- ❖ Reassure children and give them space to share how they felt during COVID related situations like complete lockdown, online classes, exams, etc. as well as now when the schools are reopening. Also, let them know you are available for them. By addressing (listening attentively and responding meaningfully) to their concerns, parents can help to ease anxiety in children. Try not to minimize or avoid the concerns of children.
- ❖ Children observe behaviours and emotions of adults for cues on how to manage their own emotions, particularly during difficult times such as the pandemic. Therefore, be a role model to your child.
- ❖ Share with them how you deal with your own stress in the present situation to help them understand that they are not the only ones and even adults/their caregivers experience stress and are making efforts to cope with them.
- ❖ Take note of any changes in patterns of emotions and behaviour of children such as bed-wetting, clinginess, excessive temper-tantrums in young children; excessive worry or sadness; avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past; difficulty with attention and concentration; unexplained abdominal ache or body pain; irritability and unrestrained and difficult behaviours in adolescents, etc. Watch out for the tendency to seek repetitive reassurance. In case of significant distress in the child, do not hesitate to seek support from a mental health professional in your locality or through toll-free Manodarpan Helpline number (8448440632).
- ❖ Children with special needs require close observations. Do discuss /share your observations with counsellor / special educator in school for facilitating your child's learning and supporting their behavioural needs to ensure her/his welfare. For any medical support, contact the local medical authority.
- ❖ Don't compare your children with others. Every child is unique and has different abilities and capacities to flourish, may be at different time and in different fields. Also every child has their own ways to deal and cope with stress



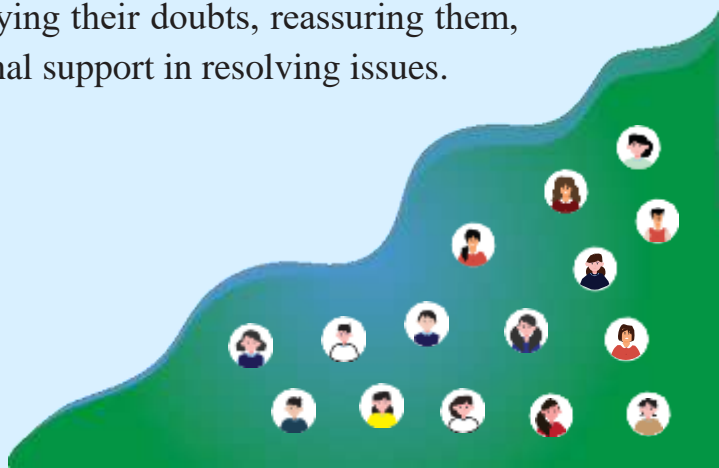
and anxiety. As a parent one can try to explore the child's style of coping and help her/him to know other ways of coping as well to choose from.

- ❖ Engage in creative activities with your children. Make them feel responsible and contribute to their own and family, teachers and classmates' safety and well-being.



## Enhancing Physical and Mental Health

- ❖ Each member of the family needs to make time for self-care. Parents are a strong pillar of support within the family. It is important for you take out time to relax and find sometime for self-care and activities which give you happiness.
- ❖ Encourage children to stay active by following a routine which can consist of having a set time for sleeping, waking up, eating, learning, playtime, etc. With reopening of schools, slowly but steadily bring a change in the schedule at home to which the child had become adjusted with during online classes. Preparing a restructured schedule may help children to stay focused, disciplined and psychologically prepared to attend school in person. Add age appropriate relaxation techniques in daily routine as it is good for their physical and mental health (such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, silent sitting, etc.)
- ❖ Engage in regular exercise/playing outdoor games with your children, eat healthy food and have sufficient sleep. Plan and play some games involving the entire family. These will provide opportunities to children to relax and enjoy, enhancing the bond with their family members.
- ❖ As a parent, you can play a vital role in ensuring that your children maintain their mental health. This can be done by listening to them, acknowledging their difficulties, clarifying their doubts, reassuring them, generating hope and providing emotional support in resolving issues.



## Reopening of Schools

Reopening of school in present times has taken on a new meaning and a new set of worries for parents and other caregivers. Some of the new concerns due to COVID-19 pandemic are: children coming in contact with the infection and managing the anxiety of attending school physically after a long time. It is important to understand that every child may respond to the 'new situation' and related anxieties and stress differently. Some of the common responses you may notice are changes in sleeping pattern, bedwetting, stomach ache or headache, changes in eating pattern, withdrawal, anger, school refusal, clinginess or being fearful of attending school.



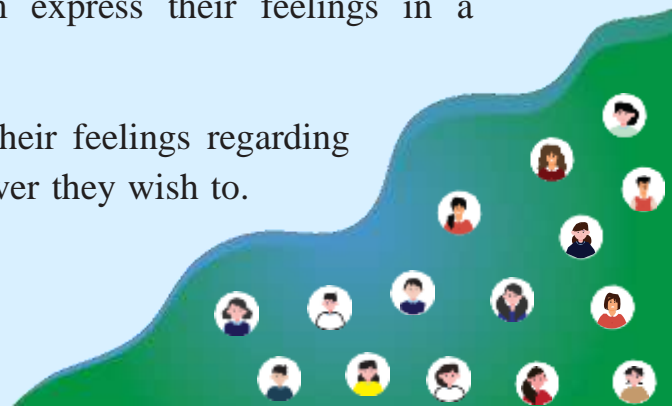
- ❖ Reiterate with children the importance of always maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene practices in school and other public places and encourage them to follow these.
- ❖ Connect with other parents and share information which can be of help and use to each other.
- ❖ Stay calm and reassuring during this transition phase. Remember that this is a phase—adjusting to constantly changing environment requires time and patience.
- ❖ Reassure your child of your love and affection. Avoid comparisons as every child is different so are their areas of interest and skills.
- ❖ Create a healthy learning environment at home. A good atmosphere and comfortable learning space can lead to better learning and revision.
- ❖ Encourage children to make daily and weekly study schedule and also make sure that they are following it.
- ❖ Provide them reinforcement for their efforts. It not only encourages children but also motivates them.
- ❖ Have realistic expectations from your own self as a parent as well as from the child. Accept the strengths and limitations of the child.

## SUGGESTIONS AND PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

- ❖ In order to help students, it is important that teachers take care of their own mental health and well-being at all times, especially now when schools are reopening.
- ❖ Many students may have experienced loss of near and dear ones. Some of them may have seen financial losses in the family as well. This may have resulted in multitude of emotions like sadness, disappointments, anger, grief and bereavement, etc. As teachers, listen and validate their concerns, try to understand their lived experiences, thoughts and feelings and express your understanding to them.
- ❖ As a teacher, you can also help students to understand their emotions. Introspective questions such as – What makes you feel these fears/anxieties? What can one do to deal with them? What options do we have to deal or manage instead of just avoiding? Remember that dealing with students' fears and anxiety is a gradual process which requires patience and tolerance.
- ❖ Answer their questions openly and honestly about the future uncertainties such as possibility of school closures in future, probability of their friends (or teachers) falling ill with COVID-19, not doing well in examinations or any other stressful situations that may occur during the upcoming school year.

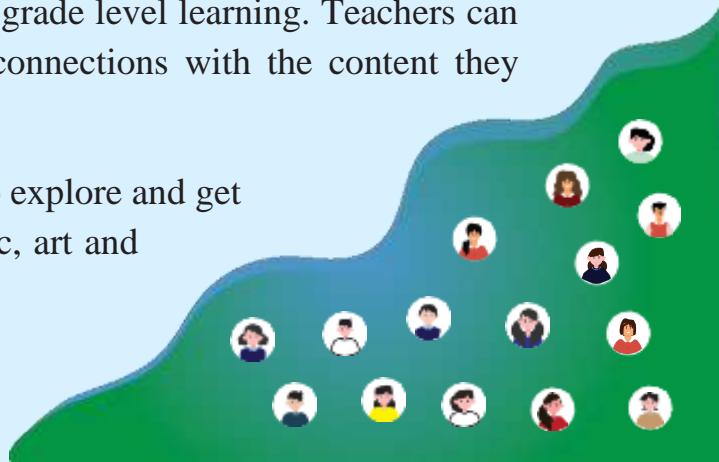


- ❖ Engage students in expressive art activities such as drawing, painting or storytelling, etc. which can help them express their feelings in a supportive environment.
- ❖ Let students know that they can share their feelings regarding COVID-19 or any other concerns whenever they wish to.



Reassure students that they are not alone and support is always available.

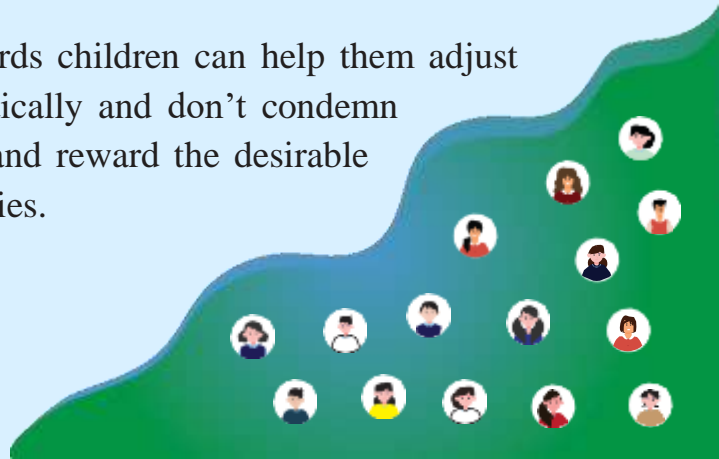
- ❖ Enrich the utilization of human resources available in school such as school counsellor, special educator and the school nurse/ doctor for necessary inputs regarding health concerns and creating awareness on mental health and well-being.
- ❖ Encourage children to maintain a section in dairy/notebook ‘My Doubts and Worries’ where they can write their emotions and feelings, worries and doubts. Motivate children to write another section ‘My Gains and My Learning’ where they can share positive stories of what new skills they developed during the pandemic, how they coped and also share stories of some act of kindness that they have done or seen or read of someone do it. These can be shared on school’s website and will bring out lots of stories of resilience.
- ❖ As a human being, it takes some time to adapt to the changing situations. Thus, schools may give some time before taking any test or exam to reduce the stress level.
- ❖ Schools can have a 10-15 minute meditation/mindfulness session before starting the days’ classes where the students and staff can sit quietly and breathe deeply to relax. It will help reduce tension, stress and increase feelings of well-being. This may be particularly effective for middle and secondary stage school students. Younger stage students may be asked to practice sitting in silence.
- ❖ Make sure you help students to set small and manageable goals as they may feel anxious about coming back to in-person learning which includes — dealing with physical class changes, being attentive in class, sitting patiently at one place for a substantial amount of time, keeping books/notebooks organized, interacting with peers, etc.
- ❖ Online learning may have created learning gaps in students. To address these learning gaps, the first step is identification of these gaps and then building on the pre-requisite skills for grade level learning. Teachers can help students to build context and connections with the content they have learnt.
- ❖ Create the opportunities for students to explore and get involved in activities like dance, music, art and





craft, sports, etc. in school. It may help them to discover their passion and develop skills in that particular area. It also has therapeutic effect. Provide them the opportunities to join peer groups with similar interests which can help them to build interpersonal and social skills along with their interests.

- ❖ Watch out for any warning signs in the behaviour of children that interferes with their ability to explore, play and learn. Take help of school counsellor in case of professional support is required.
- ❖ School administrators can provide training and support for staff, if there are large number of children who are facing difficulty with transition related to reopening of schools.
- ❖ Help students to reduce exam stress. Encourage them to practice, give their best, and not worry about anything else. Research shows that teachers' positive expectations help students perform better.
- ❖ Keep some time to clear students' doubts and check their understanding about the concepts. Give some tips on how to reduce stress during examination, how to prepare well, etc.
- ❖ Clarify and discuss the question paper's format, effective ways of learning, preparation and writing examination for example, ask them to attempt the paper neatly, and write in neat and clean handwriting.
- ❖ Conduct regular revision tests for practice. This way students will prepare and learn the lessons regularly. Revision tests can help students to check how much they know and what more needs to be done for improvement in learning.
- ❖ Encourage students to take-up some physical activity as it will help in preparing well for exams.
- ❖ Encourage students to manage a small break for doing any form of physical activity they enjoy.
- ❖ Teachers' warmth and affection towards children can help them adjust well. Listen to their concerns emphatically and don't condemn their fears and anxieties. Encourage and reward the desirable behaviour and show trust in their abilities.

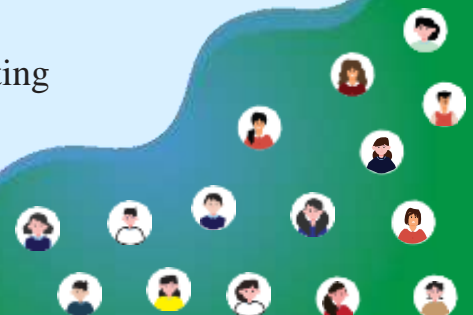


- ❖ In order to help students to deal with different concerns, SAHYOG interactive sessions are organised by Manodarpan Cell, NCERT, in which experts from the field engage in collaborative discussions about wellbeing from various perspectives. These are available on [NCERT OFFICIAL - YouTube](#).

## SUGGESTIONS AND PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

The pandemic has caused new challenges for students and their learning. The constant change from offline to online and back to offline classes has been challenging to students. Although online learning has helped many students and given a better opportunity to learn in a safe and comfortable environment of home, having a flexible schedule, but for many it was a disadvantage. This had also altered their daily routine and led to self-discipline and learning challenges for students. As the students are going back to in person classes, here are some tips for students for smooth transition:

- ❖ In present situation of going back to school, it is normal to feel, worried, confused, scared, angry or disturbed. Remember that you are not alone. Like you, many others are facing similar challenges. Talk to someone you trust, like your parent, teacher or friends so that you can help keep yourself safe and healthy.
- ❖ Don't stigmatize your peers or tease anyone about being sick with COVID-19; remember that the virus doesn't follow geographical boundaries, ethnicities, age or ability or gender.
- ❖ Take help of teachers with academics and clear all doubts without any fear. It will help you to build your confidence and will also bring concept clarity.
- ❖ Focus on developing skills of writing the exams, writing legibly, managing time in the examination, dealing



with stress, etc. apart from working on learning the study material. Understand the concepts and topics, which will help in remembering the subject material.

- ❖ Have a set time for meals and bedtime. It would be wonderful to include some form of physical exercise as part of this routine. For instance, simple breathing exercise, yoga, skipping and stretching.
- ❖ Food provides nutrition to the mind and body. Choose to eat a healthy balanced diet and available home-made food. Healthy food and snacks are important for better concentration and memory. Also drink plenty of water. Remaining hydrated is vital and adds to your overall positive mood. Sleep well for better physical and mental health.
- ❖ As we all are going through difficult times, come forth to being a peer educator/mentor with the help of your friend, teacher, school counsellor and family, if you can. You can also initiate and innovate peer support for learning, socio-emotional skills, sports, etc.
- ❖ You can listen to SAHYOG live interactive sessions available on [NCERT OFFICIAL - YouTube](#) to get more tips.

