



Mental Wellness During COVID-19

For Elders and Seniors

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, our Elders carry our stories and traditions. They were always close and we were able to spend time and learn from our Elders. When we spend time learning from our Elders, we create a sense of hope, belonging, meaning and purpose in our lives as well as theirs. They are a connection to our history and we need keep them safe.

Mental wellness for Elders and Seniors

Acknowledging that Elders and Seniors are particularly vulnerable to the virus, many local, provincial and federal sources have urged this group to avoid going out of their home and to avoid contact with anyone outside of their home as much as possible. This may result in increased boredom and feelings of isolation for them. It is important to be thoughtful about the unique circumstances of Elders and Seniors during this time.

Older adults, care providers and people with underlying health conditions

1. Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.
2. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce the risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way. It may also be helpful for information to be displayed in writing or pictures. Engage their family and other support networks in providing information and helping them practice preventative measures (e.g. handwashing, etc.)
3. If you have an underlying health condition, make sure to have access to any medications that you are currently using. Activate your social contacts to provide you with assistance, if needed.
4. Be prepared and know in advance where and how to get practical help if needed, like calling on a trusted family member or friend, accessing services of the health center, having food delivered and requesting medical care. Make sure you have up to 2 weeks of all your regular medicines that you may require.
5. Learn simple daily physical exercises to perform at home, in quarantine or isolation, to maintain mobility and reduce boredom.
6. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting or other activities. Help others, through peer support or neighbor checking
7. Keep regular contact with loved ones (e.g. via phone or other accesses).

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

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/>

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

<https://www.afn.ca>

<https://who.int>

Living alone Elders or Seniors may find themselves in isolation.

Here are some general tips to maintain wellness:

Reach out to others, online, phone calls, texting, social media or video calls—connect regularly with other people to seek and provide support.

- ◇ Have contact numbers of Community resources in the community or at the health centre for use by Elders/ Seniors for getting their needs met or if they require additional emotional support.
- ◇ Stay hydrated and eat well. This one may seem obvious, but stress and eating often don't mix well, and we find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and/or avoiding food.
- ◇ Ensure you have access to your medication and medical information in case of emergency.
- ◇ During times when you feel stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- ◇ Exercise regularly and keep regular sleep routines.
- ◇ Spend time engaging in hobbies or past times such as reading, singing, sewing, beading, puzzles and other things that bring you pleasure.
- ◇ Find lightness and humor in each day. There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day. Remembering old times and recording them can be a good idea.
- ◇ A near-constant stream of news reports about the pandemic can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day from health professionals and WHO website and avoid listening to or following rumors that make you feel uncomfortable.
- ◇ Keep things in perspective. Remind yourself daily this is temporary. It seems in the midst of this quarantine that it will never end. It is terrifying to think of the road stretching ahead of us. Please take time to remind yourself that although this is very scary and difficult and may go on for an undetermined amount of time, it is a season of life and it will pass.

A teaching to help understand what we are going through with the COVID-19 crisis.

When a bear goes into hibernation, they do it for the health of their community and themselves. In the winter, food is scarce, hibernating allows other animals to have access to the limited resources. It slows the spread of disease and viruses among other animals during a season when immune systems are lowered, and energy is limited.

It is also a time of conserving health for the bear, a time for reflection... it is a time that allows you to renew, to undergo change, to honour your place in life and food cycles.

It is not a time for anxiety or fear. When it is time for hibernation, a bear can finally relax. All of the stress of finding food, territory, and a mate disappears. The bear believes that they have done enough and trust in themselves. They know this process is necessary and they will come out the other side renewed.

Be the bear. Stay home. Rest. Know you are doing this for something much bigger than yourself.

Reach Out!

Here are some helpful numbers if you need to talk.

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

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

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