

**Recognize** that outbreaks of communicable disease create tremendous stress for everyone. This may be especially true for clients who have been through trauma and deprivation or may already have significant burdens. Be prepared that some clients may exhibit significant distress.

**Be patient.** Give clients the time needed to express their thoughts and emotions. Practice active listening. Listen to what the client is trying to convey through their words and also their emotions.

**Validate** that it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during this time.

**Speak calmly, slowly, and in a sensitive manner.** Keep questions simple and focused.

**Provide information that is accurate,** simple, and is focused on the client's questions or concerns.

**Be aware of your own stress and needs.** Utilize resources provided by your Human Resources department and seek support from friends, family, and colleagues.

### SAFETY & WELLNESS GUIDANCE

**Help clients pro-actively identify coping strategies.** Some questions you can ask include:

- *What are things that you have done in the past that have helped you cope or feel safe?*
- *Who can you talk to that you trust to help?*
- *What are things that you can do that help distract you or keep you from worrying even if it is for a little bit?*

**Encourage** clients stay in close contact with people who are important to them, including talking often with family and friends and trying to avoid socially isolation. Some of this may have to be done via phone, text, email or social media apps.

**Promote** routines in daily life, even if they cannot leave home. This includes regular sleeping, waking, and eating times.

**Support** healthy practices including exercise that is safe and appropriate to their health and situation. (For instance, stretching at home or taking a walk with appropriate social distancing.)

**Remind** clients that limiting media exposure can reduce worry and agitation. Additionally, when consuming information about COVID-19, remind clients to only seek out and follow advice and information from reputable sources.

**Discourage** unhealthy behavior including smoking; alcohol and substance use; sleeping all day, etc. This can include having conversations with clients who already have alcohol or other substance dependency issues to practice harm reduction.

*\*Adapted from materials from the World Health Organization, Center for Disease Control, Psychology Today, Psychological First Aid, and IRC's Duty of Care*



**Ask** if they know what to do to stay healthy and repeat safety practices as defined by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and [World Health Organization](#) (social distancing, hand washing etc.)

**Provide** resources for up-to-date accurate information in their language. If this is not available in their language, encourage them to find someone they trust to read or access this information. (Explore the COVID-19 resources on the RITA Resources website)

**Recognize** that many of the public's reactions to COVID-19 may be triggering for clients who have experienced war and disaster, such as empty grocery store shelves. Remind clients that many empty store shelves are temporary, and they will be restocked. Most of the empty shelves are a result of people buying more food than normal, but not of a food shortage.

### GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

- Children respond to stress and worry in different ways. They may be more clingy, anxious, angry or agitated. They also may regress to bedwetting, not being able to sleep through the night, and other similar patterns of anxious behaviour. Encourage parents to respond in supportive way by listening, comforting, and reassuring children they are safe.
- Be flexible about expectations as more anxiety may equal more emotional dysregulation. Change and stress may bring about more problematic behaviors that require patience and reassurance rather than punishment.
- Parents should provide science-based facts that are age appropriate. Younger children require simpler messages with more reassurance, while older children may be able to manage more complex information. Teach children to [practice good hygiene](#).
- Encourage parents to limit media and television coverage of the pandemic as children may misinterpret what they hear or be frightened about things they don't understand.
- Engaging in normal routines like eating, sleeping, and bathing at regular times is helpful in reducing children's stress and anxiety. Encourage parents to keep to regular schedules as much as possible and be a role model in healthy behavior.
- Spend extra time with children, including allowing for time for fun and play.

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