

SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR THOSE IN NEED

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worlds upside down.

As young ones in Halton Hills and across the region struggle to make sense of it all, the adults they rely on for support may be immersed in their own feelings of anxiety and frustration.

To illustrate the potential impact of the pandemic on a family's mental health and well-being, the Halton District School Board held a virtual information session Monday (March 29) for parents of elementary students.

"We know parents are struggling to balance work, child care, self-care while keeping worries, both yours and your children's under control. Young children may be oblivious to the facts of the situation, but they may still feel unsettled by the

changes in the routine, or they may pick up on the fact that people around them are worried and upset," said Noorie Soni, mother of two and a panelist for the event.

Strict COVID protocols have created lots of changes to kids' daily routines, said board social worker Kim Menezes-Francispillai.

"Children may be experiencing a sense of loss and isolation with virtual learning, and sometimes perhaps struggling with changing family circumstances, maybe family health or a job loss."

Start by listening to your child as they describe their thoughts and emotions. They will tell you how they feel. Help your child to look for positives, things to be grateful for, she added.

"Mental distress can be



Melanie Hennessey/Metroland

Virtual schooling and a lack of regular socializing is leaving children susceptible to stress and anxiety.

recognized as a struggle whenever we or someone we know experiences negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours that become intense and long lasting — anything longer than two weeks — or if it interferes with their ability to function and meet daily goals," said Menezes-Francispillai.

If you feel your child may be anxious or

stressed, the first step is to go to your child's teacher, said Menezes-Francispillai.

Additional supports include the special education resource teacher (SERT) available at every elementary school, the school principal or vice-principal, a child or youth counsellor, the school social worker, or reach out to community supports such as Reach

Out Centre for Kids (ROCK) or Kids Help Phone. The board also offers online resources through hdsb.ca, she said.

There are also publicly funded mental health supports in the community at ROCK to support you and your young ones, said Shivani Patel, ROCK's access and system navigation lead.

Live Answer allows families and service providers to connect with ROCK's virtual walk-in clinic, crisis support, services for children under 6, and general information and resources, said Patel.

Live Answer 289-266-0036 is available between Monday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

ROCK also offers Quinn, a virtual chat bot, available through its website rockonline.ca which also supports access to services. Quinn is available Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"It's a neat way for youth

who have a hard time making calls for them to be able to chat with ROCK staff over this feature," said Patel.

ROCK also has a dedicated crisis service with a 24-7 crisis line 905-878-9785 for youth up to 18 and their parents and caregivers.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Parents may not realize the potential mental toll the pandemic is taking, not only on them but their children. In our ongoing effort to shed a light on this issue, we sat in on the Halton District School Board's virtual information session for parents of elementary school children to highlight how COVID may be impacting the family and offer some coping strategies.



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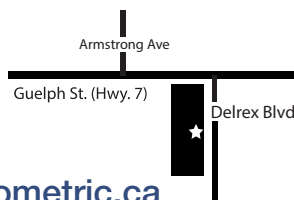
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