



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Staying Connected during the Pandemic

Drawing on Indigenous Strengths to Stay Connected and Well

The current COVID-19 pandemic may remind us of past stories or activate blood memories of relatives impacted by colonization and intergenerational trauma. Some of our relatives may have been deliberately exposed to infectious disease or experienced inadequate health care and health resources.

In First Nations culture, we have traditionally supported each other by sharing stress collectively. We often carry the stress of relatives in our bodies, so that they do not need to carry their stresses alone. Through connecting this way, we thrive in the best of times and survive in the worst of times. Sharing stress collectively also means we may experience increased feelings of fear, worry, anger, shame and other challenging emotions.

For support, we can lean into our cultural strengths, knowing that First Nations in BC have a long history of resilience. We have traditions and practices that ground us in the present and keep us well – spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally.

Our holistic practices can help ease feelings of personal, collective, and inter-generational stress during the pandemic. Taking care of our wellness will calm us while we fulfill critical roles within our families and communities.

We have many cultural strengths to draw upon to stay connected and keep well, even while we practice social distancing. Here are a few ideas:

- **Support those around you** – Call an Elder or a young person every day to check in. Send an email or text to a loved one. Make a video call so people know you are thinking of them.
- **Get out on the land and reconnect with nature** – Harvest traditional medicines and foods. Take a walk. Get out on the water.
- **Seek wisdom from knowledge keepers and traditional healers** – Learn about traditional healing practices and medicines. Many of our medicines strengthen and cleanse our bodies and minds. Note that there are no cures for COVID-19 at this time. Many of our knowledge keepers and traditional healers are available online and by telephone.
- **Prioritize your wellness** and focus your energy by using prayer, meditation, daily affirmations and mantras such as 'I am resilient'.
- **Embrace this time to spend with your children** – In traditional education and child-rearing practice, we taught our children daily about our history, culture, language, and life skills. We learned as families.

Spending time with children - here are some ideas:

- **Build structure into your days at home.** Both children and caregivers do better with a routine. Try to build in quiet-time activities children can do in the same room as you. Also, block off periods of time for physical activity or time outdoors. Remember that young children are not able to sit quietly for long periods of time.
- **Tell stories.** Share your knowledge about your culture, call an Elder who will tell stories, or read to your children.
- **Learn and share traditional knowledge.** Learn outdoor survival skills. Share what you know about the plants, animals and land around you. Learn and practice ways to harvest, prepare, and preserve traditional foods – and involve your kids in this process.
- **Incorporate ceremony.** Smudge every morning, do sunrise ceremony, and check in with others to reaffirm your love and relationships.
- **Kind words and thoughtful gestures help.** Use non-physical ways to show love to people while practicing social distancing.
- **Practice your traditional songs and language.** Visit www.firstvoices.com for online language resources.
- **Integrate life skills.** Teach young ones how to do daily household chores, cooking, cleaning and yardwork. You could even learn to garden as a family.
- **Play!** Children learn so much through play and are especially happy when their parents and caregivers join in the fun.
- **Model self-awareness and mindfulness.** Scan your body and name where you are carrying your feelings. Then set unhelpful feelings down into the land.

“The land – forests, mountains, earth and water – has informed all of our cultural and ceremonial practices. The land defines our identities and relationships with it. It has capacity to hold safely much more than we can hold as human beings alone. We can offer what we cannot hold, or what does not belong to us, to the land to take care of.”

Confidential, Culturally Safe Support:

KUU-US Indigenous Crisis Phone Line:
1-800-558-8717

Hope for Wellness Indigenous Online Chat:
www.hopeforwellness.ca

Telephone-based Health and Cultural Support:

Indian Residential School Survivors Society:
604-985-4465 or toll free 1-800-721-0066

Tsow-Tun-Le-Lum:
1-250-268-2463

For more information and resources, visit www.fnha.ca/coronavirus