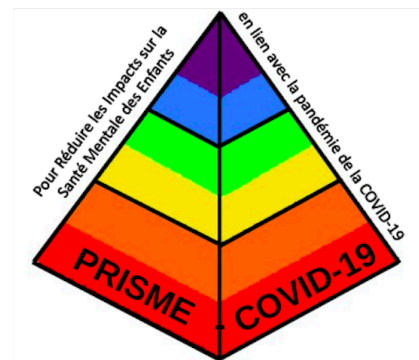


# On the Uptake



childhood  
disability  
**LINK**



## Ensuring the mental health of children 5-12 years old before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of children 5-12 years of age and the unique challenges experienced by children with neurodevelopmental disorders: A Synthesis of Recommendations



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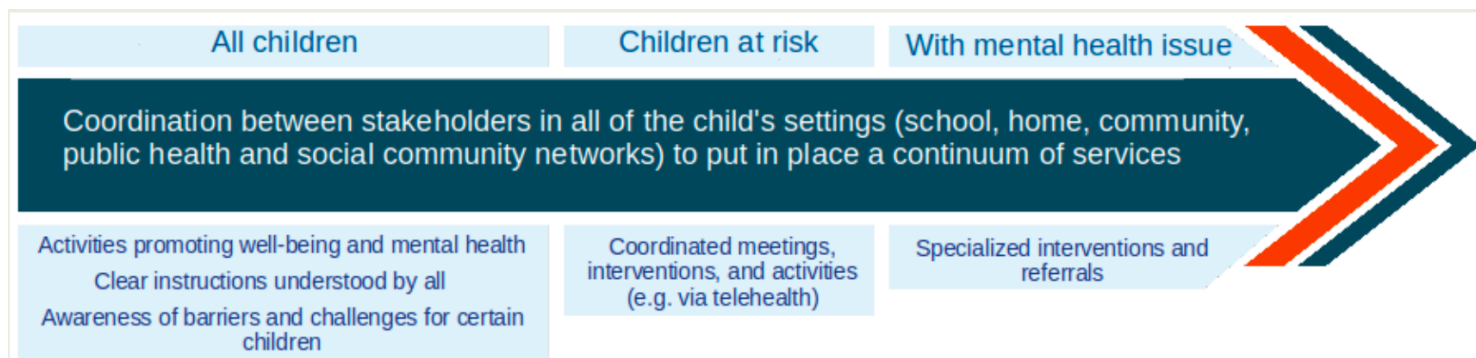
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Since the beginning of 2020, Canadian children have had to adapt to many changes across different areas of their life. In addition to the disruption of school routines (drop-off / return to school, home schooling), family and social routines, health monitoring, outings and outdoor recreation have all been disrupted. This is without considering the added effects of anxiety about the virus, unpredictability, ...

... as well as the confusion or even the misunderstanding around certain government measures (e.g. wearing a mask, closing public places). Although all children have been impacted by the pandemic, some are at greater risk of having their well-being and mental health affected by COVID-19, in particular children who already had challenges, neurodevelopmental disabilities, or a chronic health condition.



A team of thirty university researchers, health professionals, and partners from non-profit and private organizations did a literature review and interviewed Quebec parents to explore the impacts of the pandemic on children aged 5-12, with an emphasis on the impacts that are commonly experienced by children with disabilities or with a chronic health condition. The aim of this study was to identify promising interventions and recommendations to support children's mental health during and after the pandemic.

**Recommendation 1: Promote the wellbeing and mental health of all children on an ongoing basis.**

Disruptions to daily activities caused by the pandemic have created new situations for children to manage, some of whom already had mental health difficulties before the pandemic. Whether they are studying at school or at home, the mental health of all students aged 5-12 must be a priority in all of our activities.

→ Communicate with children based on the principles of caring and positive interventions

→ Maintain a routine and activities as close as possible to normal

→ Encourage the implementation of activities that support well-being and relaxation as well as inspire a positive outlook

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→ Facilitate regular contact for children and families with their educational network, whether face-to-face or remotely. Work in collaboration with existing school and community teams and resources

→ Inform children of the evolution of the pandemic using a positive, age-appropriate approach

**Recommendation 2: Equip people in children's social and support systems with the tools to recognize and to screen for signs of psychological distress in order to intervene early**

These signs could be changes in mood, signs of anxiety, trouble sleeping, or the onset of crises. Particular attention should be paid to certain children: those whose loved ones have had or are at risk of having COVID-19, those who live in an urban environment, whose parents are essential workers and those who were already presenting difficulties (e.g., at school, with family, socially or with health) before the pandemic.

→ Be aware of signs of psychological distress to know how to react positively and refer to a professional according to the child's needs

→ Be aware of mental health protective factors to strengthen one's own mental health and, by extension, that of children

→ Pay extra attention to children at risk, i.e. children with neurodevelopmental disabilities and children who had difficulties with change before the pandemic, while remaining vigilant towards all children

**Recommendation 3: Strengthen the health-school-family-community network as well as the collaboration and coordination of each party to lessen the impacts of COVID-19 on children's mental health**

→ Develop and strengthen existing partnerships to ensure that there are continuums of services and that support can be scaled up as needed

It is vital that links exist between school teams, families and parent committees, public health and other players in health and social services, and community associations with relevant expertise to support students during the pandemic.





Childhood disability LINK is a bilingual website linking Information and New Knowledge on childhood disability to service providers and families. The website also focuses on enhancing the awareness and understanding of research on a variety of issues in childhood disability.

Please visit us at:  
[www.childhooddisability.ca](http://www.childhooddisability.ca).

#### Available resources:

Jasmine Roy Foundation toolbox:

<https://fondationjasminroy.com/en/toolbox/>

Webpage from the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) on 'COVID- 19 and your child':

<https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/health-conditions-and-treatments/the-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

Robert Debré Hospital's Practical Advice for Families:

<https://www.debrechildpsychiatry.org/toolbox>

'COVID-19 Resources' webpage by Child-Bright Network:

<https://www.child-bright.ca/covid-19-resources>

Report on the results of this study (FR):

<https://labo-grandir.com/favoriser-la-sante-mentale-des-enfants-de-5-12-ans-durant-la-covid-19/>

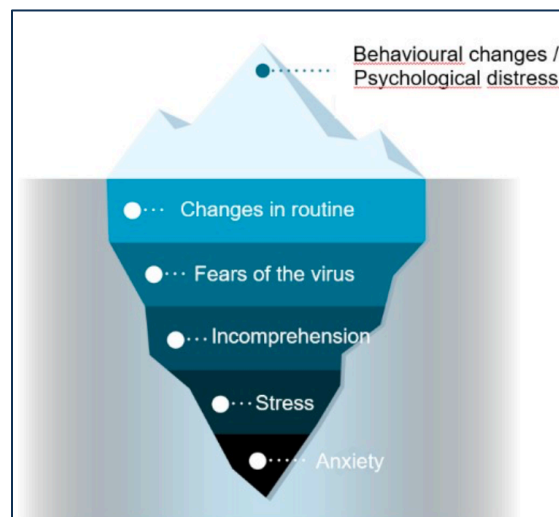
→ Post training activities offered by school teams, community workers, and health and social service professionals on a centralized, free and available platform

→ Rapidly implement measures when a child is at risk of having mental health problems, using a gradual service approach

Although the majority of children have adapted to the public health crisis, it is important to remain vigilant, promote the well-being of all children, identify those who are experiencing more difficult times or who have mental health issues, and ensure that they are provided with the necessary support. This requires teamwork between families, school teams, health and social service professionals and community partners.

Finally, special attention should be given to the parents and even more broadly to the child's entourage (e.g. teacher, educator) to help them in the coming months to take care of their mental health and, consequently, to pay attention to the children's well-being, in a positive and welcoming manner.

Best practices and resources are provided to support the implementation of the recommendations presented in this newsletter (left).



*"I'm just thinking about a child with ADHD who needs to move, it's not going to be as easy because you can't start walking around the classroom, there's less movement possible because there's mask management, social distancing and all of that."*

*" They are the ones who will be the most difficult to recover, those who were already having difficulties, the gaps will have widened and affected them even more. It's going to be even less fixable."*

*"Routine is extremely important for my son and so is a sense of belonging."*

*"I noticed that it had an impact on their sleep. The kids didn't go to bed before 10:30-11:00 at night because they weren't tired."*

*"It really helped him to have social contact with his peers, we really saw a big difference. "*