

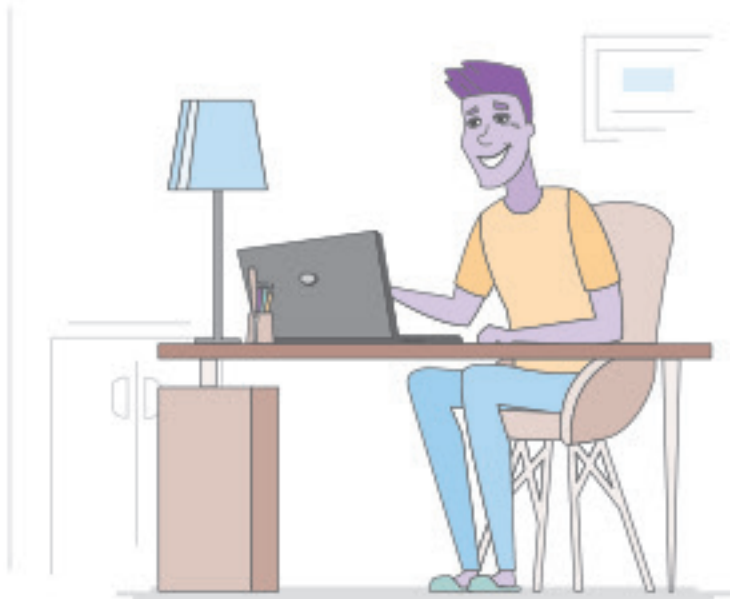
Mental health and COVID-19: Talking to a loved one

Information for family members of people with developmental disabilities

This time may be very challenging for people with developmental disabilities. Some people might not understand why their school, day program or workplace is closed, or why health care appointments, recreational activities or staff visits have been cancelled. In addition, they may be bombarded with information from friends and through social media and television, which can cause anxiety and alarm. They may also sense the anxiety of their family members or staff who support them.

The rules about physical distancing might be hard to remember or understand. For example, someone may not understand why they can no longer visit a grandparent or give them a hug. They may not get why it is unsafe for them to travel far in the city, or attend a group gathering, for example because of an older person living in their household.

People with developmental disabilities need to be reassured in a way that matches their developmental level. It can be helpful to look at **explanations developed for children** as well as **resources for people with developmental disabilities**.



This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit www.camh.ca/covid19

You may consider holding a family meeting to talk about the following:

- Acknowledge the person's fears and how hard it is to change their routine.
- Explain what COVID-19 is, and what happens if someone gets sick.
- Outline the steps everyone in the family is taking, and can take, to keep safe.
- Ask what they can do to help (for example, remind family members to wash their hands).
- Discuss any questions they may have.
- Promise to talk about it again if they need to talk more.

Other possibilities to consider

Limit the person's exposure to television and social media.



Get them involved in activities that can help them to feel empowered – this might involve cleaning the house, or setting up a schedule for the day.



Help them to find resources designed for people with disabilities, so they can better understand what is happening and get their questions answered. The H-CARDD program has helpful **resources designed**

for people with developmental disabilities and links to other websites with useful and accurate information.



Help them to understand the importance of physical distancing. Encourage them to avoid in-person contact with others, except the people who live or work in their home, or if they have to go to a medical appointment or to buy food or medicine.



If you support a person who is not a family member, then consider holding a joint meeting along with others who live in their home, or a meeting where you speak with the person along with a family member participating by phone or video conferencing (for example, Skype).