



VILLANOVA COLLEGE

26 March 2020

Dear Parents and Students

A Message from your Counselling Team - Counselling support during school closures

With the outbreak of COVID-19 we know that many in our community will be experiencing feelings of stress, uncertainty and worry.

So as to relieve one small part of that uncertainty, we just wanted to take this opportunity to inform you of the situation regarding counselling services in the event of school closures.

Please be assured that the well-being of our students and their families is important to us and that we will continue to offer counselling support during school hours and normal term dates. Due to the current circumstances, the format of this support will, of course, have to change.

After consultation with health authorities and our various professional bodies it has been decided that service should be provided via e-mail and phone. For current clients our individual e-mails should be used for initial contact and a day and time for phone contact organised:

ahellwig@vnc.qld.edu.au

tsakellariou@vnc.qld.edu.au

awright@vnc.qld.edu.au

Given the limitations of phone communications, the focus of calls will be to check-in with those we see regularly and to address areas that are of a more immediate concern to them. If you feel that a greater level of support is needed, for example ongoing therapy, we recommend that you contact your family GP to arrange a referral to a suitable service.

For new clients/referrals and general enquiries the following e-mail should be used and one of us will then contact you by return e-mail to organise whatever follow up is required.

counsellors@vnc.qld.edu.au

If events occur outside of contact times, or in an emergency, please contact your family GP or dial 000 as required. If events occur outside of contact times, or in an emergency, please contact your family GP or dial 000 as required. An attachment listing various agencies and organisations offering support, and a 'Managing Mental Health amidst COVID-19' tip sheet, have been attached to this e-mail.

It is important to communicate with young people. Young people need to feel informed and safe, especially when they hear so much information in the media – and not all of it accurate. Young people will inevitably pick up on the concerns and anxiety of others. It is important that they can speak to you about their own concerns. Discussing COVID-19 situation openly with young people will provide the opportunity to reassure them that they are safe and dispel any misleading information they may have heard in the media or through rumours.

Although the current situation is unprecedented, the world's ability to respond to this situation has never been greater. The world's top health experts can communicate with each other the results of their research. The world's leaders can work together to determine the best way to keep us safe. In these days of on-line communications, we too can support each other in ways never possible before. There are only two things we really need to remember, be calm and be kind to each other.

Keeping you in our thoughts,

Mr Tass Sakellariou, Ms Ashleigh Wright and Mr Adrian Hellwig

MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH AMIDST COVID-19

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has proven stressful for individuals and communities. People are feeling anxious, overwhelmed, out of control, uncertain and in some cases panicked. We have all seen evidence of this with panic buying and people acting outside of their values in order to ensure they are stocked up and prepared.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.

The emotional impact of an emergency on a person can depend on the person's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the person and their community, and the availability of local resources. People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- People who have pre-existing mental health conditions
- Children
- Parents of children with a pre-existing health condition
- People with elderly parents
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, such as doctors, nurses, pathology or first responders.

Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- ☐ Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones
- ☐ Catastrophising and thinking of worst-case scenarios
- ☐ Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Worsening of chronic health problems
- ☐ Panic buying
- ☐ Increase use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- ☐ Fear of leaving the house and interacting with others (above the recommendations of social distancing)

While we are not able to control many elements of this pandemic, what we can control is how we choose to manage our mental health. There are many things you can do to support yourself, your children and other loved ones at this time.

Helping children cope

During a crisis, heightened media coverage and ongoing conversations can be distressing for children/adolescents. They may need help to understand what's going on in a way that's appropriate for their age and development.



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How to help children/adolescents cope during a crisis:

- Limit the amount of media coverage they see, hear and read. If they do watch the news, be there to explain it to them and answer any questions they may have. Ask them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings
- Have a conversation with them about what information they are receiving through their Facebook/Instagram feeds. There is a significant amount of exaggerated information or opinion pieces out there.
- Be honest and stick to the facts
- Give them a sense of control by explaining what they can do to stay safe (e.g., wash their hands regularly, stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing). Explain to them the importance of taking preventative hygiene measures. For young children, this video can be useful as a visual tool in explaining why hand washing is beneficial. [View here.](#)
- Monitor their reactions and listen to how they feel and what they think. Particularly for those children/adolescents who have existing mental health conditions (e.g. anxiety, depression, OCD).
- Point out the people who are working to fix the situation
- If schools do close, ensure your children have a regular routine at home that mirrors a school day as this is familiar and predictable. Ensure that they incorporate exercise and family time into their day. Monitor their phone/TV use and model appropriate use with them.
- Use humour to reduce stress
- Your own behaviour plays an important role in helping children deal with the current situation. It's ok to share your own feelings but show your child that you are managing them. This can help them to build important life skills like resilience. If you are feeling distressed, discuss it with other adults rather than your children.



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Helping yourself cope

- Read trustworthy news sites. There is so much conflicting information out there. The World Health Organization, the Australian Government Department of Health, and Queensland Health are best placed to provide you with the facts.
- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19. News is available everywhere, which means it can be hard to switch off. If you feel that you're preoccupied by the news, consider setting yourself reasonable limits. Avoid exposure to news before bed as it can interfere with your sleep.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Download the smiling minds or Headspace Mindfulness apps and listen to these with your families. Eat healthy well-balanced meals as this will also help your immune system.
- Connect with others. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships by calling, Facetiming or Skyping with friends. Please remember to check in with your elderly family members, particularly those who live alone or are in nursing homes. Loneliness and isolation will be a real concern for them. You can set them up on Skype/Facetime or call them regularly.
- Keep perspective. Remember that crises swamp the headlines because they are so infrequent and out of the ordinary – this is what makes them newsworthy. Worldwide, we have more knowledge and better technology than at any point in history. This means we've never been more prepared to handle crises than we are right now, and this capability will only continue to improve.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking. Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade.
- When to get support
- Most people will feel some distress during a crisis. This is normal, and usually resolves naturally within a matter of days or weeks.
- If you or a family member have taken steps to enhance mental wellbeing but are still feeling stressed, overwhelmed, worried, or just not like your/their normal self, it's important to tell someone. You can also seek support from your GP and many Private Psychologists will be offering appointments via telephone/skype.

Available Supports

- ☐ Call **13Health** (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- ☐ Visit the **Headspace** [website](#) for information on stress related to COVID-19 and other topics, as well as access to e-counselling support
- ☐ Contact **Kids Helpline** (1800 55 1800) or visit their [website](#)
- ☐ **Lifeline Australia's** telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 or visit their [website](#)
- ☐ Obtain help and information from the local **General Practitioner** or Community Health Centre.

This information was adapted from the [CDC](#) and [QLD Health](#)



SUPPORTS AVAILABLE WHILE YOU ARE AT HOME

Phone and online services:

Youth Beyond Blue: 1300224636

Beyond Blue: [online chat is available 3pm to 12 am]

Kids Helpline: 1800551800

Web chat available via website www.kidshelpline.com.au

Email counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au

eHeadspace: 1800650890

CYMHS [child and youth mental health service] Acute Response Team: 30682555

Face-to-face appointments:

See your **GP** who can refer you to a Psychologist

Psychologists can see you in person or via eHealth

For Mum and Dad:

Parent line: 1300301300 [8 am – 10 pm 7 days a week]

Lifeline: 131114

Mindspot Clinic: 1800614434 Online and phone support for anxiety and depression

Beyond Blue: 1300224636 www.beyondblue.org.au

www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au

Emergency Support:

In the event of a mental health emergency, or if you are at immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, please contact emergency services on 000 or present to Queensland's Children's Hospital Accident and Emergency Department.

