Impact of Covid-19 on the Mental Health of Youth

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced everyone around the world to adapt to a new way of living. These changes and adaptations come with challenges. Research shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of youth.

Switch to online schooling –> Lack of peer interactions
Youths have been significantly impacted with the switch to online schooling, due to the loss of structure and familiar social interactions. This is especially true to those with a pre-existing diagnosis such as ADHD (SickKids). Youth thrive from interacting with peers of their age, which helps their social and emotional development as well.

Youth are also missing out on celebrating milestones with friends and family (i.e., birthdays, graduations, vacations, prom and other school events). These milestones play an important role in a young person's life. When these are not celebrated, youth can experience real loss and feelings of grief and as missing something meaningful and important to them.

It is also important to recognize that online schooling provides fewer opportunities to report cases of child abuse. Halton Police has reported a 73% drop in calls and Halton CAS is seeing a similar decline in investigations (approximately 50%). With no teachers and school staff to report abuse to, children and youth are left trapped in abusive homes and environments.

Financial stressors
It is no surprise that many families have lost their business or received layoffs from work. These major events not only affect the individual(s) working, but their family members as well. "The level of parents' perceived stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate or buffer mental health and behaviour problems in children" (Public Health Ontario).

What can be done? – Encourage healthy coping strategies
Have a routine – It is easy for youth to take advantage of the flexibility online schooling provides (i.e., attending in their pajamas from bed). Create a fun space for youth to attend their online classes that is outside their bedroom. Create a mini classroom/study space with school supplies and their favourite snacks. Help them in setting out times for snack and lunch breaks.

Minimize screen time – Encourage youth to participate in a variety of activities (i.e., hiking, walks, biking, baking, painting, etc.). Have a limit on how much time can be spent on social media each day.

Talk to a trusted adult – Empathize with youth and let them know you are there to talk to them. Acknowledge any stressors in the home and build a safe space for youth to share their feelings.

Be creative – Find ways to celebrate important milestones, either virtually or through drive-by celebrations. It will show youth that their milestones are important and remembered during these tough times.