

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Alberta Blue Cross<sup>®</sup> provides mental health tips for return to school during COVID-19**

Starting a new school year can be a stressful time for children and parents alike. But add in the unknowns of starting a new school year in the midst of COVID-19, and many parents and children across the province are experiencing high levels of anxiety.

Through this time of uncertainty, Alberta Blue Cross is reminding parents to keep an eye on their children's mental health—as well as be particularly conscious of their own mental health needs.

"These are definitely not normal circumstances, and what should be an exciting time for many of us and our kids has turned into a time of worry and fear," says Brian Geislinger, vice-president of Corporate Relations with Alberta Blue Cross, who has three children returning to elementary school classes this fall.

"These next few weeks represent an exceptionally challenging back to school season for our children. We all realize this and want to be there to support our families, so we can navigate these circumstances safely and successfully," says Braden Norman of Homewood Health, an organization that Alberta Blue Cross works with to offer counselling services through individual and employee family assistance programs provided through many of its benefit plans. They offer the following advice to help parents and children through the stressful period of returning to school during the pandemic.

### **Prepare as you normally would for any year**

- Gather school clothes and buy school supplies in advance.
- Ensure your emergency contacts are known and readily accessible to your child, the school, baby-sitters or after-school programs.
- Establish bedtime and morning routines a week or so in advance of the start of school, so that sleep schedules and wake up times are in line with the school timetable.
- Strategize and develop "back up plans" for days when your child is sick so that emergencies don't catch you off guard.

### **Stress-less tips for your kids**

- Regularly let them know you understand they're stressed and don't dismiss their feelings.
- Make time for your kids each day. Play a board game, read a book together or watch a favourite show as a family. Sometimes kids just feel better when you spend time with them.
- World news can cause stress. Talk with children about what they see and hear so that you can help them understand what's going on.
- With all that's going on, don't feel compelled to register your children in extracurricular activities this fall. Base participation on your comfort level, and don't add to your or your child's stress.
- Do your children hear you and your partner talking about troubles at work, worrying about a relative's illness, or arguing about financial matters? Try not to discuss such issues if children are within earshot as they may pick up on adult anxieties and start to worry themselves.

[ab.bluecross.ca](http://ab.bluecross.ca)

Edmonton Blue Cross Place 10009 108 Street NW T5J 3C5 780-498-8000	Calgary Main Floor 715 5 Avenue SW T2P 2X6 403-234-9666	Grande Prairie Suite 108 10126 120 Avenue T8V 8H9 780-532-3505	Lethbridge 470 Chancery Court 220 4 Street S T1J 4J7 403-328-1785	Medicine Hat 95 Carry Drive Plaza 105 Carry Drive SE T1B 3M6 403-529-5553	Red Deer 103 Elements at Rivers Edge 5002 55 Street T4N 7A4 403-343-7009
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- Tension is contagious. Set a good example when it comes to managing your own stress.
- Remember, some level of stress is inevitable in every child's life. Teaching healthy coping skills today will help kids weather life's ups and downs as they get older.

### Stress-less tips for you

- Recognize the need for flexibility in your life. Flexibility can make people feel less anxious, happier, grateful, and more satisfied.
- Take time to get organized in advance for what might cause the most considerable stress.
- If it's finances that are stressing you, work on a budget and create a financial roadmap for yourself for the rest of the year.
- It's okay to say no. September tends to bring on a mindset that overwork is routine. Stop before it starts.
- Take time for yourself to be present. Breathing, meditation and visualization exercises, and yoga are all important activities that heal your mind, body and spirit.
- If your children are participating in remote learning from home, establish routines and a set place in your home for learning to take place. And if you're working from home, find a balance between your need to manage your work and your children's need for support and supervision during the day. But again, recognize the need for flexibility.

"Particularly through this challenging time, we encourage our plan members to take advantage of the mental health supports available through their benefit plans," says Geislinger. In addition to counselling services, Alberta Blue Cross also offers a wide range of mental health resources through its Balance® online wellness platform.

It's important for parents to recognize that children may worry about themselves, their family, and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created recommendations to help parents have conversations with children about COVID-19. These recommendations are available online at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov).

Alberta Health Services is also providing a wide range of mental health resources to support Albertans through COVID-19. For more information visit [www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page16759.aspx](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/Page16759.aspx).

As a locally based, not-for-profit organization, Alberta Blue Cross provides benefits to more than 1.8 million Albertans. Earlier this year it committed \$500,000 from its community foundation to addressing priority needs to support Alberta's most vulnerable populations through the pandemic, and also extended temporary premium relief to its customers.

Alberta Blue Cross is ranked as one of Alberta's Top 10 Most Loved Brands, as well as one of Alberta's Top 25 Most Respected Organizations.

*For more information please contact Brian Geislinger, vice-president, Corporate Relations, Alberta Blue Cross at 780-498-8086 or [bgeislin@ab.bluecross.ca](mailto:bgeislin@ab.bluecross.ca).*

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