



*From TDSB Psychological Services to Your Family*

## ADDRESSING PANDEMIC FATIGUE

*by the Hearts and Minds Committee*

In the depths of winter, during a worldwide pandemic that has been raging on for two years, it may seem difficult to have hope for a brighter future. Many of us have been weighed down by frequent stress and we may find it difficult to cope. According to a recent survey by the Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH), anxiety levels in Canadians (especially for youth, young adults & families with children) have significantly increased to levels similar to the beginning of the pandemic.

In the early days of the pandemic, we may have found it easier, or even inspiring, to try new strategies to combat stress. We may have felt a sense of connectedness in our shared goal to combat Covid-19. But with constant closures, changing viewpoints, and periods of uncertainty and loss, our coping and tolerance might be wearing thin. We may wonder if things will ever feel more predictable.

In difficult times, it can help to recognize that "it's ok to not be ok". Give yourself room and permission to feel stress and frustration. Acknowledge with compassion that you're doing the best you can. Slowing down and taking it day by day (or hour by hour!) can help change our focus from the past or future, to the present. In this issue, we will discuss ways to become more present, validate 'not being ok', and navigate the current uncertainty of our lives.



## FEBRUARY IS PSYCHOLOGY MONTH!

The Psychological Services team is committed to providing evidence-based & culturally relevant and responsive services to the TDSB community. We provide services to every school in the TDSB, and support over 20,000 individual students annually.

Psychology staff at the TDSB have been published in peer-reviewed, scientific journals!

TDSB Psychology staff speak over 25 languages, including French, Urdu, Hebrew & many more!

Psychology staff have expertise in:

- Supporting diverse learners at school
- Understanding behaviour & child development
- Promoting mental wellness
- Using a strength-based model to support student achievement & resiliency!

Psychology staff are qualified to diagnose a variety of childhood disorders. Many times, a diagnosis can help students & families access relevant supports and funding.

Staff include Psychologists, Psychological Associates and Psychoeducational consultants. We are regulated by the College of Psychologists of Ontario & we are all qualified to work with your child!

Our articles, tips, and suggestions do not constitute treatment advice.

If you or a family member is in crisis, please contact [Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868) or [The Distress Centre: 416-408-4357](tel:416-408-4357)



## DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY & CHANGE

By Aarti Kumar, Phd., C. Psych.

One of the many characteristics humans have in common is having to face uncertainty. Even infants and young children have to face uncertainty every day. Uncertainty can be challenging, because most of us like to know what is going to happen next. Knowing makes us feel safe and in control of our own life. Uncertainty can also cause us a lot of stress.

The current state of the world has illuminated this challenge we have always had. How can we navigate an uncertain world? The truth is we are always navigating uncertainty and change, and we may be better at it than we think. For example, we experience physical changes in our body throughout our lifespan.

If every time we encounter uncertainty we find ourselves panicking or resisting against it in some way, we are not giving ourselves a chance to navigate uncertainty in a helpful way. The key is to sit with uncertainty, rather than avoiding it. Being familiar with uncertainty is a skill that will help us when it revisits, because it always will.

Children can practice "being with uncertainty" and being ok with not having all the answers.

Brainstorm with your child a list of things that are constantly changing. Here are some examples to get you started, which can be connected to school curriculum your child may be learning about:

- Explore how seasons change. What changes occur during each season? Does nature resist these changes?
- Explore animals & insects that go through metamorphosis (eg. butterflies)
- Discuss how our siblings, friends or pets grow up & change during our lifespan
- Discuss how technology has changed over time - How did uncertainty help new technology be created?

# The Learning Space

## Learning Loss in the Pandemic

Since the beginning of the pandemic, student learning has been disrupted in many ways. Students have missed several months of school due to Covid-19 and experienced challenges with virtual learning, illness, and mental distress. Emerging evidence suggests that learning losses are likely present for all students due to the pandemic, and vulnerable student populations have been disproportionately impacted.

### When should I be concerned about my child's learning?

It is important to remember that some learning gaps due to the pandemic are expected, and most students will be able to close these gaps through parent and school support. Educators are aware of learning losses and policies are being put in place to address these issues.

However, we can also monitor for signs of a deeper learning issue. For example, students who were at risk for learning problems before the pandemic are even more at risk for learning problems currently.

If you're concerned for your child's learning, consider:

- Was your child having signs of learning challenges *prior to the pandemic* (e.g. difficulty learning how to decode words or spell)?
- Has your child's teacher shown concerns for their learning?
- Has your child received academic support (e.g. Resource support), but doesn't appear to be making progress?

### What can I do if I am concerned about my child's learning?

- Start by speaking to your child's teacher about your concerns
- Based on your discussion, the school may arrange IST (in-school team) or SST (student support team) meetings to discuss your child's learning and offer strategies and supports
- Find a quiet & positive moment at home to ask your child how they feel about their learning, school experience, & mental wellness
- Remember to celebrate your child's strengths, talents, and interests!
- Click here for resources that can help you gather the information you need, and seek support if needed.

# “WHEN OUR CUPS ARE EMPTY”: COMPASSION FATIGUE

By Yvonne Martinez, Ph.D., C.Psych. (Manager of Psychological Services, LC3)

I have two young children, a daughter (age 8) and a son (age 6). They know that I am a Psychologist, and one of my kids will even tell people that “My mommy helps kids when their hearts hurt”. There have been many times when I feel completely depleted after a long day at work, and my kids want my attention and time when I get home. Despite how much I try to fake it, I simply do not have much more to give. **So, I started telling them the truth - that “my cup is empty”.** So, what does that mean?

Each of us (as caregivers, family members, and friends) are “givers”. We give our time, we lend our ears, we open our hearts, and we support those around us when they need us. As caregivers, we sometimes do not prioritize our own needs - we may even feel guilty or shameful for doing so. But the reality is, we need to focus inward at times, in order to take care of others in a healthy and helpful way. **By recognizing the times we have no more to give - when “our cups are starting to empty out” - we can start to minimize those feelings of exhaustion and increase our ability to give joyfully.**

There is a term for this in the world of Psychology - it is called “compassion fatigue”. Some have even referred to compassion fatigue as the cost of healing others. There are varying definitions, but mostly, it’s a feeling of physical, emotional, mental or spiritual tiredness, where our capacity to give, care, and experience joy starts to diminish. There are other symptoms, like negative thinking, heightened anxiety, feelings of anger, loss of sleep, and withdrawal from social settings or work.

Yet, the “cost” of compassion fatigue is often worth it for us as human beings. There is a tremendous amount of positive emotions when we are able to help and support others - sometimes helping is simply automatic.



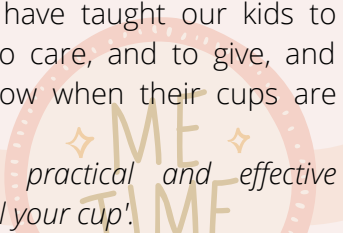
The reality is that we are all at risk and susceptible to compassion fatigue, especially as the pandemic wears on, and many of life's stressors are not within our control. **Often, the person who is experiencing compassion fatigue is the last to recognize it. So, what do we do, and where do we even start?**

Of course, self-care activities are important, such as sleeping, eating well, doing physical activities, finding time to be around those we love and care about, and simply just relaxing and caring for ourselves (I often find myself reminding myself that “doing nothing” is “doing something”). The key is finding out what works best for you.

One of the things that has worked for me is to explain my compassion fatigue to my kids and loved ones by saying that “my cup is empty”. It’s been a simple yet easy way to help explain compassion fatigue to my kids, or to signal to loved ones that I need to turn inwards and may not be as available as usual. I’ve also used other examples for my kids (e.g., a car that can no longer run because it’s out of gas), and we’ve talked about “filling one’s cup” by reading stories like this. My very own acknowledgement of these feelings has also helped me. Perhaps it is like asking for help without really asking for help. It has also opened up another conversation in my home, that “it is OK when we are not feeling OK”, and that we can turn to each other when things are feeling stressful or exhausting.

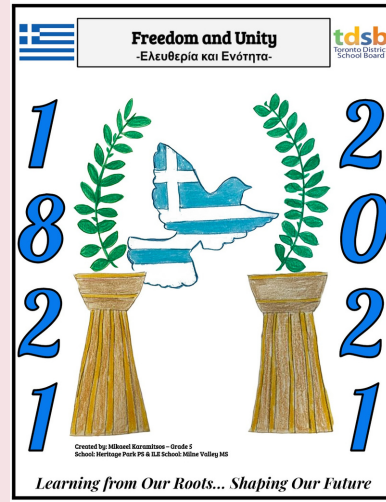
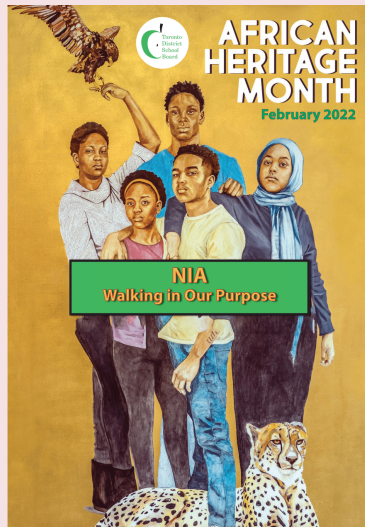
**Interestingly, my kids started to act on how to “refill my cup”, because they too have learned to be “givers”.** One day, they may find themselves feeling compassion fatigue, because we have taught our kids to empathize, to love, to care, and to give, and they will need to know when their cups are empty, too.

Use this toolkit for practical and effective strategies on how to ‘fill your cup’.



# COMMUNITY CORNER

CHECK OUT THESE EVENTS & RESOURCES FROM THE TDSB!



## CONNECT WITH US!

Parents/Caregivers of Students with Special/Complex Needs:  
Virtual Drop-in Hours

Join our Virtual Drop-ins  
Wednesdays 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.  
[www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport)

Connect with our Professional Support Services staff to talk about taking care of yourself as a caregiver and other ideas related to your child's mental health and well-being



Virtual Drop-in hours

Join our Virtual Drop-ins  
Tuesdays 10 a.m. – 11 a.m.  
Thursdays 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.  
[www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport)

Connect with Professional Support Services staff to explore ideas related to your child's mental health and well-being

