



Working with a New Reality

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Speakers

- Dr. Diane McIntosh, Psychiatrist and TELUS' Chief Neuroscience Officer
- Dr. Susan Siklos, TELUS Child and Youth Psychologist
- Erin Mills, Director, Human Capital and Workplace and Health, The Conference Board of Canada

Transcript

0:00- 1:01:41

[Erin Mills, 0:01-1:17](#)

Good afternoon, everyone. Hi, and welcome to today's webinar. My name is Erin Mills, and I'm the director of the Human Capital and Workplace Health Team at the Conference Board of Canada. As the Conference Board is located and is hosting the session from Ottawa, I would like to begin today's session by acknowledging the land that we gather on is the traditional unceded territory of the Nishina Bay Algonquin Nation, and as this meeting is being held virtually, we would also like to acknowledge all nations across Turtle Island. We are delighted today to be partnering with Telus today for this important webinar.

We'll be hearing from Dr. Diane McIntosh, Chief Neuroscience Officer with Telus, and Dr. Susan Sickles, Child and Youth Mental Health Team Lead, Telus Healthcare Centers.

Before I pass it over to our first speaker, just a few housekeeping tips for everyone. If you have any questions for the speakers or the moderator during the webcast, you can submit them through our Q&A engagement tool. You can chat with each other using the attendee chat tool as well. You can resize your windows, move them, minimize them, and adjust them to suit your visual preferences. If



you have any questions on how to use these features, included in our resource list will be the FAQ guide, and in the Q and A is the contact information. Should you like to reach out to us directly, so without further delay, I'd like to welcome Dr. McIntosh.

Dr. Diane McIntosh, 1:21-5:23

Well, hello everybody, and so honored to be here. Really, thank you to the Conference Board for inviting me to speak today. I just want to start by letting you know that I will not be showing all of the slides that we provided in the PDF because we want to make sure that we're quite succinct in our speaking part of this, and then allow lots of time for questions, so there will be some slides there that I won't speak about, but that you have that content to reflect on if you wish. So I'll start by telling you a little bit about myself. Before I went to medical school, I was a pharmacist, and then did my medical school training on the East Coast in Nova Scotia. I did a couple of years of pediatric residency, realized that I didn't actually love parents and became an adult psychiatrist, which is what I've been doing over the last 20 or so years. I'm now the chief neuroscience officer at Telus, which means I'm responsible for all the products, services, innovations that we have related to mental health, and really over the last year or so, we've worked hard to create this mental health vision that

I want to make sure that all of those products and services and solutions are aligned with, and that is to provide personalized, accessible mental health care that is backed by science and delivered with compassion. What's important about this is that, from a personalized perspective, we need to make sure that everything we do is based in scientific evidence, but personalized to meet the needs of each individual because everyone's brain is unique. Accessibility means that we want to make sure that all of the products and services we offer can be accessed by people when and where they need them. So anywhere, any anyone, any time, and finally, what is really in my mind missing from the world of mental health all too often is compassion. So we strive every day to make sure that we bring diversity, inclusion, empathy, and compassion to the way that we deliver all of these. We care about our clients. We care about our patients. So I'm going to walk you through a little story to start off before Susan speaks, and she's going to really focus on the role that we all have in enriching the lives of the children that we are responsible for, that we care about. But I want to start by talking a little bit about what is mental health and how is it different from mental illness. So this is from the World Health Organization.

I know they've taken a bit of a hit over the last few years, but they do a lot of good work. And it was from a few years ago. And they say mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to his or her community. Work is right in there. Work is good for you, and it's healthy for you. Mental health is different, however, from mental illness. So we all have ups and downs in our physical health at different times, and in our mental health, different times from a physical perspective, maybe that bunion is acting up or your back is sore. From a mental health perspective, we all have bad days sometimes.



We're not sleeping quite as well. We're a little bit worried about something. But having ups and downs in mental health is different than having a mental illness. Not everyone has a mental illness. Too many people do, but not everyone. So mental illnesses are medical conditions. This is why I went to medical school, and they impact how we think, how we feel, and how we behave. They're defined. Every mental illness, whether it's depression, schizophrenia, bipolar, they're defined by a constellation of symptoms.

Not everyone has every symptom, but that's like if you have depression, you would have a depressed mood or a loss of interest in things that you would normally enjoy, that you would get pleasure from. Changes in your appetite, changes in your sleep. If you were diagnosed with schizophrenia, you may experience auditory hallucinations. So these symptoms come together to create that diagnosis. Every psychiatric diagnosis is associated with distress.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 5:23-9:43](#)

People who are living with a mental illness, suffering from mental illness, suffer. It's distressing. It also impacts for every psychiatric disorder functioning at work, at play, at home. It impacts your ability to perform your usual roles.

Now, when you think about it like that, every single Canadian, every single person is impacted one way or another by mental illness, and that doesn't mean that you personally may experience a mental illness, but maybe someone you love. And when our loved ones suffer, we suffer with them. Maybe it's someone you work with or care about. So, in any given year, one in five Canadians will personally experience symptoms of a mental illness. One in 24 will actually be diagnosed with a serious mental illness, and one in 20 will have a diagnosed substance use disorder. So you can see that mental illness has a massive impact on all of us, or on the Canadian population, and it's also deeply personal for many of us as well. Now, like all things in life, there is a continuum or a spectrum that mental illness presents, or mental health, I guess, is the best way to say a spectrum.

Where my job, unfortunately, means that I most often see people. I always see people when they're in crisis. As they get better, we're moving them towards improving their functioning and reducing their stress, and then getting them back to healthy. And my job is always pushing towards the left and trying to keep people healthy. It may surprise you to know, however, that it is possible to intervene at every step along this this spectrum. That even if you're healthy, there are many things you can do, including exercise, which grows brain cells and is a treatment or a preventive measure to help to prevent depression for anxiety. It grows brain cells, which helps to keep your brain healthy, and it doesn't take all that much. I'm not looking for a four-minute mile. There's no Lululemon required.

Getting 30 minutes a day, getting your heart rate up, is enough to grow brain cells and act as a preventive measure for depression or support your recovery. Having a healthy diet that supports a healthy gut biome because the bugs that live, the bacterium that live in your gut, actually have a



major impact on your brain health. Maybe you're at work and you're not fully engaged in what you're doing, or not feeling like you're on the right trajectory. You can work with a professional coach. So there are places at every spot along the spectrum for us to intervene. And it's my belief that we need to work on intervening earlier because once you're in a full-blown crisis, you're not able to work. You're not functioning well. You maybe are on disability. That makes everything much more difficult to overcome. It creates challenges. If you're off work for a year, you have less than 5% chance of being able to get back to your old job again. So we need to be dealing with things as early as we possibly can, even when people are well, making sure we're reinforcing that wellness. I also want to make this critical point that your brain is connected to the rest of your body. Your mind-body connection is real and it's critical.

So if you have a mental illness, if you're suffering for depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, that increases the risk of physical illnesses, all kinds of physical illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, other inflammatory illnesses. The same, the reverse is also true. If you have any of these challenges, physical health issues, that increases your risk for mental illness. So patients are often very concerned about taking treatment, even though they have a serious illness. And I'm very confident when I'm able to say, doing a really good job of treating your mental illness will protect your physical health.

Now, we have all, as a community across not just our country but around the world, been facing a major stress over the last 18, 19 months. I call it the COVID-19 mental health trifecta. So all of us have some degree of health anxiety, whether that's related to our own health, the health of the people that we love, or maybe our whole community, the world. Also, many of us are struggling with financial stress, and again, it might not be you personally.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 9:43-14:02](#)

You have a job, you're financially stable, but maybe you're coming up to retirement. You're worried about your RRSPs. You're worried about inflationary pressures in the supply chain. So these each can take a little bit of a different form for each individual, but they are the reality for most people. And then we have. Stress of isolation, of quarantine, and of loneliness, which really is a pandemic in and of itself. Loneliness has been associated with the same kind of physical outcomes, believe it or not, as smoking half a pack a day, of obesity, of diabetes. So it is a critical part of your mental and physical health, and when these things are happening simultaneously, it has an impact on all of us. When this pandemic started, I was actually comforted by the fact that scientists were working, and we were getting new information every single day about this virus because I understood that as they were doing this research, they were discovering that this is a different kind of coronavirus. But that also made a lot of people very anxious.

This concern that why aren't the scientists getting it right? Why don't they have the whole answer? We all live through what is truly chronic and unpredictable stress, and for our brains, it's absolutely the worst kind of stress to live with, in fact, we use chronic, unpredictable stress in animals to



provoke depression, so that we can do research on depression. That's why it's so important this chronic, unpredictable stress and how it's impacted our mental and our physical health, because we know that it's associated with changes in how your brain is structured, how your brain functions, as well as with depression, anxiety, cognitive problems, including Alzheimer's disease, inflammatory illnesses. So we've all lived through this distressing time of COVID, and that's why we're seeing the kind of impacts on human beings and the concern about this mental illness tsunami associated with COVID that we're just going to start to see the edge of now more and more over time. So I want to make the point that for all of us to endure this kind of stress over time, we need to take care of ourselves.

We can't help other people and be effective in that role if we don't care, take good care of ourselves, and that's why I want to segue into this whole concept of resilience. And I realize that it can mean different things for different people. So I'm going to define resilience from my perspective and walk you through some core pieces of this. Resilience is not just getting through adversity, it's actually going through that adversity and emerging with new strengths and skills, coming through with strength, and sometimes that's really difficult because the adversity is great, but we all, as human beings, have the ability to build adversity. Now, you may have popped out of the womb and been the kind of kid who is a little more on the vulnerable side, and then some of us pop out, and we are highly resilient. But this is a critical point. Every single one of us can build resilience. It is these are pieces of life skill. Not only can we build them ourselves, we can, as leaders at work, help to build resilient teams as parents or loved ones of young people, we could actually help to build the resilience of our children. And as they build resilience, we build resilience. And that brings me to this critical point: fake it till you make it.

Even if you're not feeling particularly resilient, as you're behaving in a resilient manner, you're actually becoming more resilient, and that's because of your brain getting wired in a positive way. It's called neurogenesis. It happens all through your life that you grow new brain cells. Unfortunately, it peaks around 30 and goes downhill afterwards, but it still happens all through your life, and it happens when you learn new things. So when you learn to drive a standard shift car or a bike really hard in the beginning, but as you learned, those neurons, those brain cells started to fire together simultaneously, and then they wired together. So now, when you get in a standard shift car, you probably don't even think about where's the brake or where's the clutch. You know automatically, or when you get on a bike, the same sort of thing.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 14:02-18:13](#)

So the more that you act in a positive way when you work on these resilient skills, you're building that wiring in your brain that helps you to be more resilient. So I'm going to speak about four little pieces of resilience, all critically important: how we manage our expectations, our ability to anticipate and accept change, our acceptance of what we can and cannot control, and finally how we talk to ourselves or our internal narrative.



So this is my husband's favorite quote. I think expectations kill happiness, and what that means is that stress occurs when our expectations are not aligned with our reality, our everyday life, and if they're constantly misaligned, it can make us really frustrated, feel stressed out, or even experience anxiety. And of course, that leads us not to perform optimally. Now, I'm not saying don't have any expectations, don't try. That's not the goal here. But ensuring that if you're putting expectations on yourself, or. Or your family members, or your workmates, that they're realistic expectations. That the individuals, including yourself, that you're putting that expectation on, have the tools necessary, the environment necessary to be able to successfully deliver. Because otherwise, you're going to be frustrated all the time. Back to our brains for a moment, and our brains are very simple, or what they're really hardwired to do is to simplify everything as quickly as possible. So that's how our brain is hardwired not to look for differences.

But if you look at this picture here, most of you are seeing, I hope, a dog when really it's just a bunch of blobs on a page. But you were able to simplify it quickly and know that that looks something like a Dalmatian. That simplification that we do actually can get us into a little bit of trouble because it stops us from looking for change for change, or looking for differences. So I remember in medical school, people saying when you hear hoofbeats, you look for a horse, not a zebra, but you still have to have your mind open to the fact that there may be a zebra because that sore throat, most of the time, it's just a virus. But sometimes it's strep throat, so we have to make sure that we're always thinking about: Am I being biased to what I see and not considering change? Why is that important? Because how many times have you in the last year said, "Oh, I just want to get back to normal, but that's an illusion. Normal does not exist.

Really, there is now, and there is a future, and it's going to be different. And resilient people accept, they expect, they anticipate change. If you expect it, then you're prepared, and you recognize that life is constantly about change, and if you're not prepared for it, it's a lot harder to ride those waves. This has a picture of a gift on it, and that is because this is truly a gift I gave myself. It took a long time to actually embed this in my genome so that I accept it every day. The only human being on Earth I can control is me. I can't control my kids. I can't control my husband. I can't control my workmates. But I can absolutely control me, my my thoughts, my feelings, and my behaviors.

Now, people when they suffer from anxiety sometimes will feel completely out of control of their life, and they often will engage someone like Dr. Cyclos to learn how to identify those thoughts and feelings they have, confront them, and then work on changing those feelings and changing those behaviors. Even that is an act of trying to gain control. When you think about if you have children, when they popped out, they poo, they scream, they do whatever they want. You can't control them, you can't control anyone else, but you do have control of yourself. And when I embedded that in my brain and live by that, it relieves so much stress. I don't try to control anyone else, but I make sure I'm constantly thinking about what can I do. Is there something here that I can do to change this situation, and if I can't, then I have to alter my plans. I have to alter my behavior.



The last thing, or sorry, just further to that, is that I can't control everything that happens to me.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 18:13-22:03](#)

However, so I feel responsible when I'm successful, also when I screw up. But I have to remember the fact that bad things happen to good people sometimes. There are random events in life, and so I want to make sure that I'm responsible for the things that I actually have control of, and I don't want to be a perpetual victim. So I alter my behavior when I'm feeling that I'm out of control or that I don't have control in a situation. The last little bit is about well, I think it's one of the most important things: how we talk to ourselves, our internal narrative. So, of course, you're your own narrator. You're the one who's talking to yourself all day long, and if you're mean to yourself, you're harsh. You're constantly telling yourself you're a loser. How did you do that? Oh my gosh, anyone else could do it better. That leads you to think about yourself in a negative way and behave in a more negative manner.

The same way that you can wire your brain, that neurogenesis that can be positive when you're learning a new skill, a healthy new opportunity that's come your way, you can also negatively wire your brain, and that's why this is so important. The more that you're negative and saying negative things about yourself, the more your brain is wired to say negative things about yourself. So, to create positive change in your life, you must change the way you talk to yourself. And the same way that you want to treat other people as you'd want to be treated, you got to treat yourself the way you want to be treated as well, and speak to yourself more empathically. Think about it like this: your gut brain, your visceral brain, your automatic reaction-the emotional part of your brain-is this elephant in front of you, and your more cognitive brain, your conscious self, the one that thinks ahead and critically thinks about things-that's the little stick figure on there. If you're constantly fueling. This emotional brain. If you're constantly saying negative things, you're going to lose control of it. You're not going to be able to use that higher part of your brain.

Your emotions, that elephant, is going to run amok, and you're going to feel more and more out of control. So that harsh self-talk is really destructive. It scares the heck out of your subconscious, and it leads to worry and anxiety, you become a hostage and it fuels itself. It's also infectious. The more negative you are at home, with your friends, at work, the more it affects people around you. And also, when we're feeling really negative, we tend to project that feeling on other people. People don't like us, and they're like, "What are you talking about? I like you just fine. But if you're constantly telling yourself that you're not a good person, then you start to think everyone else agrees, and that's often not the case. So it's important to encourage with everyone, including yourself, constructive questioning, new ideas and opinions. But that's different than negativity. Being solution focused, you have your moment of negativity, and then okay, how am I going to change my thoughts, my feelings, and behaviors to change the way I feel right now?

Now, I want to make the very quick point that resilience, as I said, means different things to different people, and what it does not mean is that you should be accepting bullying, sexism, racism. That is



not what it means. This whole concept of saying you know be you got to be more resilient, suck it up, Buttercup. That's offensive. And what really, when I say resilience in those contexts, what I'm referring to, we can't stop the fact that there's going to be bullies, racists, and sexists out there. We can't change other people.

We can control us and make sure we're not bullies or racists or sexist, but we have to be able to because we can't get rid of all those kinds of people. We have to be able to weather those storms and the other storms and adversities that come our way with grace, with dignity, and that means we believe that we're worth more than that, and we can demand to be treated better. And so that's when I talk about resilience. That's what I mean.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 22:03-22:29](#)

So, as a quick recap, resilience is built by considering the expectations you place on yourself and others, and making sure you have the tools and the environment to succeed. Expecting change because it's coming, and you don't have a whole lot of control over that. But you only can control you, not another human being in the world, and just be kinder to yourself. I'm going to hand it over to Dr. Sickles. Thank you for your attention.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 22:30-27:23](#)

Thanks so much, Diane. That was so great. So I'm going to be speaking a little bit about parenting and some parenting strategies, but I wanted to kind of highlight first that although I'm kind of talking about parenting, this really applies to anyone who is a parent, a caregiver, a role model for kids. Those teachers, nurses, aunts, uncles, grandparents-it's all those people who are important influences in the lives of children.

These are all important for all of you, and so we'll talk about specific challenges for children and youth right now, and raising children during COVID. A little bit on managing your own anxiety through these times, supporting anxious kids and teens, and talking a little bit about building a resilience in children and teens. So I like to start off with Charlie Brown because he is the epitome of the kinds of kids that I often work with. So many of these children who worry all the time and worry about their worries, and I'd say right now in particular there are a lot of bereaved kids out there. Children's mental health has been greatly affected by COVID over this last 18 months.

We are seeing big spikes in mental health crises, admissions to emergency rooms, and things like that. Eating disorders, anxiety-all of these things. So it's really important to be mindful about how children are doing, but before speaking about how children are doing, it's really important to speak about how you are doing as a caregiver, because you know if you can't manage your own stress and anxiety, if you're not doing well, if you're not coping well-it's very, very challenging to support others. So we really, really need to watch how we're doing. You know, thinking about healthy coping, caring for yourself, but self-compassion is also really important, right? I mean, we all know that we should be dieting, eating well, being healthy, sleeping, exercise-we all know that.



But what happens when we're not? How are we talking to ourselves? Like Diane spoke to, what is the narrative? How are we being kind and understanding and compassionate to ourselves, or are we beating ourselves up, or are we ignoring our pain and suffering, which is also. Not great. So really, looking at how you are doing, and there's lots of reasons that COVID in particular is making parenting even harder. So you know, managing screen time has gotten that much harder because kids don't have as many activities. They can't have as many social opportunities. Same for teens. There's smaller social circles who are working from home. There's a lack of boundary between you know work time and kid time. It's really hard to just make plans and have a long time as parents and recharge socially and get out. So these are all things that are making it that much harder. Some of the strategies that are still very important as parents during COVID are self-care and self-compassion, and I'll speak to these more.

Being consistent because lots of things are unpredictable, so let's put in predictability and consistency where we can. Communication, connecting with our kids and teens, and helping with anxiety. So, I mean, talked about you know the idea of you need to put on your own oxygen mask first. If you're caring for kids, this is really important. We all know. I mean, I'm a parent. I've had those days where I did not sleep enough. My stress levels are a bit higher. I'm not as good a parent when I'm not doing as well.

And so, it is important to take some self inventory to check what I need, make sure we're caring for ourselves, but also how, like we talked about, how are we being compassionate? How are we talking? How are we being kind to ourselves and gentle? Managing our own stress and anxiety. Noticing I'm not tolerating very well. This not knowing when is when is really going to be over. When is the normal back? Right.

A lot of those thoughts of not who at school is vaccinated, who isn't. All of these pieces of uncertainty, especially if you're someone who maybe was a bit more stress and anxiety prone before all of this, it's going to be harder now. So it's really important to be creative, find ways as a family to care for each other, and kind of change things up.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 27:23-31:48](#)

So going for family walks, everybody will benefit from that. Having a friend of mine started during COVID family theme nights, where it was dress up in a style and eat that kind of food from that country, and just kind of get out of the normal monotony and change things up to care for everybody in the family. It's also very important to be consistent. So that is a really hard thing for most parents. If you put in a rule, if you put in a bedtime, trying as much as possible to be consistent with that will be beneficial for your kids. It's one of the reasons school goes so well for kids.

They know exactly what to predict. What's coming up in terms of when's recess, when's lunch, what time do I have math class, when's PE? They know, and that helps them to feel grounded in the



predictability of it. So, especially now when there are many uncertain things as much as possible. If you can give children and teens that predictability, and if you say, let's say this is bedtime, sticking with it, it will help bring their anxiety or stress down. Communication so important, and what I often talk to parents and caregivers about is listening to your children, hearing what they're telling you, validating how they're doing, empathizing and validating, but not going so quickly into fix it mode.

And that's really hard for most parents. I know, like if my kid comes home and is telling me I was picked on by this kid, or my teacher wasn't wearing her mask properly, or whatever it is, a lot of parents have an instinct to go, oh, I'm going to call that person, or I'm I'm going to do you want me to speak to your teacher? I'll speak to your teacher, and yes, you want to have good communication with school, but you also want to teach your child how to advocate for themselves, how to have that conversation with the teacher, how to deal with problems and face them. And obviously, it's a balance.

There will be ones that are too hard for kids to deal with, and parents need to intervene. But trying not to be, you know, how in Canada we call it sort of a helicopter parent, the snow cloud parent, right? Like instead of clearing all obstacles out of the way for your child and making everything easy, the best way for our children to build strength and problem-solving skills and communication skills is to let them do some of that in an age-appropriate way. It's also really. Important that we're talking with our children to hear what it is they're hearing. What are they hearing from their friends? What are they hearing at school about what's going on around them? About news about COVID, and making sure that you're providing age-appropriate information to your children so that they do know what the facts are, so that they're hearing from you, you know, reliable information and clarifying things, and particularly with the teenagers, checking in regularly with your teenagers. So, hearing how they're doing, checking in, making yourself available, connecting one on one, taking them out for a coffee, just the two of you, check-ins and communication is really important. important.

I'm going to skip that slide and move on to managing anxiety, and I want to speak briefly about excessive reassurance seeking. So many of our anxious kiddos tend to come to parents frequently with things like, "What about this? What should I do about this? Should I touch that? Should I wash my hands? Should I wash them again? What if what if I touch them and I didn't wash my hands and I get COVID? Right. So, if any of you have those kids around you who are asking the same question repeatedly, that's excessive reassurance seeking. So, if you have answered the question twice or three times, that's a great moment to go.

Hey, pointing out the emotions, you seem to be really stressed right now, or you're worried. And but also, I know I answered that question. So, can you remember what we talked about helping them to problem solve. What do you think you should do? What do you think is the best thing? Because reassurance seeking is a bottomless pit.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 31:48-36:24](#)



The more you give your child reassurance, which helps them in the moment bring their anxiety down, and helps you in the moment because now your child is not asking you the same thing over and over. It reinforces both of you in the moment, but the more you do it, it reinforces the anxiety, and your child will keep asking those questions over and over.

It's also other signs to notice if your child is kind of stressed or not doing well. Is are they having a lot of anxious thoughts? There is like ask me what if, what if this, what about this? Not sleeping at night. Can't settle down. You know all of those kinds of things. So monitoring that and seeing if your child maybe needs help with managing some of those things. And there's great resources for for parents to be able to help kids and teens with worries and stress and mood, but then there's also obviously community support as well. Mindfulness is a great way to support whole families with stress, anxiety, mood issues, and I won't go into detail in any of these. But as a family, if you can bring in various mindfulness practices, so starting yourself as an adult and then teaching your kids.

There's things like a Calm app that has anywhere from five-minute meditations to longer ones. There's kid-focused ones, learning how to take belly breaths or have deep breaths, or sometimes teach kids about box breathing. So the idea that you're going to inhale, hold your breath, and then exhale, hold your breath, and having that visual and structure really helps ground kids and learn how to breathe and do something for themselves that they really need to do for just a few moments to bring themselves down, and mindfulness really is just about being present in the moment without judgment. And so there's lots of ways to be very present. You can go for a walk and count how many colors of green you see in the trees, and get your child to be noticing what's around them or what are what are five things they see? What are four things they hear? What are three things they feel on their bodies? Two things they smell.

One thing they can taste in their mouths. Like, how do you get them into their senses, into their environment instead of into your head? Because when you're feeling stressed and anxious, you're all in your head. You're all like thinking about the thoughts and feeling things in your body. So if you can kind of just notice what's happening around you in this moment right now, because those worried thoughts are like those are about what are coming later. How do we kind of get grounded and be more mindful? So I want to kind of switch over from okay, how do we help our kids who are already maybe feeling stressed and worried in those times, to how do we build resilience? And so this idea of how do we help our kids face adversity because we are facing. Diversity at these times and come out stronger, like Diane talked about.

And some of the key ways that we can we know we build resilience in children and youth are through fostering strong relationships, helping children learn to manage their big emotions, teaching them how to be flexible and problem solve, supporting self competence, which is the idea of feeling good about yourself and the things that you do well, and knowing what your own strengths are, and then modeling optimism. So, strong relationships. So we often think first as caregivers about that



parent-child relationship, and obviously that's a very important one, and so fostering a strong parent-child relationship is important.

But it's not the only relationship, and there's a lot of evidence that shows that children who have a trusted adult in their life are more resilient, end up facing adversity better. So, for all of you that are that coach or teacher or aunt or grandparent, you can be that person for a child where they feel they have someone they can speak to that they can trust, that will support them, that sees their strengths, knows what they're great at. That person, that relationship helps children and youth face adversity and become more resilient.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 36:24-40:42](#)

It's also really important for kids and youth to feel a sense of social belonging, and so that can be with their peers, it can be teammates in sports, it can be a theater troupe. But being socially connected is helpful, and finally, just a sense of community, and that means different things for different people. And some people find their community through little networks of close family friends. For some people, it could be a religious community or a national community. If you come from a different country, any of those things can be give children and youth a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and all of those will help their person needs. It's really important to help both model good management of emotions and helping kids learn how to manage big emotions. So it's good as an adult caregiver to notice what do you do when you're feeling big emotions? When you're feeling really mad, for example, do you kind of yell and lose it, or do you stay calm? So it's okay to have the big emotions.

We always want kids to know those emotions are telling us something. When you're mad, something is happening around you that you're not happy with, and it's important to know that. So, as a parent, saying something like, "I understand that you're mad. I totally understand that, and it's not okay to hit your brother, or and it's not okay to swear at you, right? And I often teach parents this comes from DBT dialectical behavior therapy, which is replacing but with and right, so when we say I understand that you're mad, but you can't hit me, kids hear it's not super validating. Like, like you can be mad, but actually can't really be mad because you can't do these things. So when you can just replace those but with ands to go, I hear, I see that you're sad, and I, you can't take other people's things. Those two things can exist at the same time, and they're totally fine. And that's the message we want to give to our kids. The feelings are fine. We want to learn healthy ways to cope with those feelings.

So some of those things we might do would be some grounding, some breathing. There's a visualization we use in ACT Acceptance Commitment Therapy called dropping anchor, which is kind of this idea of you're a boat and the emotions are a big storm around you. So now the waves are getting bigger. There's winds blowing, and you're about to get blown into the shore. What can you do? You can drop your anchor, and so that visualization of grounding yourself, weathering the storm. You're not making the storm disappear. We're not making the emotions just disappear, but they do



always pass, just like a storm. Change always happens. So, what do we do to ground ourselves through it, and then see ourselves through, so that we're not acting impulsively or in a way that's going to hurt others or make the situation worse. And for younger kids, it's things like learning to take a break, like reminding yourself that when you're feeling really mad, the best thing to do is remove yourself from the thing that's making you really mad.

Maybe that's going for a walk, or reading a book, or listening to music, and giving yourself that break to bring those feelings down because when we stay in it, it just gets worse. Being flexible and creative problem solvers is really important. So this idea of I sometimes use the imagery with kids of being a big strong tree that will bend. But not great. So learning how to be flexible, learning how to face things that are unexpected, and be able to go with it. And a big piece of that is being pleasant-minded in what's happening right now.

Being good problem solvers, recognizing the emotions. Yes, it's disappointing that the birthday party got canceled. I get that you're so sad, and let's talk about what some other things we could do right now, and what can we plan for in the future to kind of replace that, and also letting your child make mistakes, right? Like we talked about before, teaching them how to advocate for themselves, teaching them how to problem solve, as long as it's age appropriate, and they're not going to get hurt, right?

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 40:42-44:54](#)

So obviously, you're not going to put your five-year-old into going to talk to the principal about something that's happening at school, but you know your 13-year-old probably could go and talk to the teacher and get some help around something that's happening. So you know, allowing your children those opportunities to problem solve and be flexible and and go with the flow. Self confidence is all about how we feel about ourselves, and for a lot of kids and teens, they think that school is where we're supposed to get our self confidence. So we're supposed to get good grades, and that's supposed to make us feel good.

But there are many kids who are not A students. In fact, the average student gets average grades and not straight A's, and that's totally okay. So if you have a child that is being hard on themselves, for example, and saying things like "I'm high stuff at school or stupid, you want to always be highlighting, not in a oh no you're great like not in insincere but though that's hard let's talk about the things that you are good at right because pretty much every kid I work with has some talents you know if school's not great for them what are their social skills like how are they at sports arts are they helpful, generous, kind?

Really highlighting your child's strengths because when they feel that they have strengths, when they recognize them, they will feel better about themselves, and they will grow up to be more resilient, recognizing that we all have strengths, including each child. In terms of optimism, we know that optimism protects children, teens, and adults from depression. There's a lot of evidence to show



that if you can change some of your thought patterns, like Diane spoke about, to be more hopeful, to be more helpful, less negative, it's going to be protective against depression and anxiety. Now, when I talk about optimism, it's realistic optimism.

So we're not saying it's going to be fine. Coding will be over next week. No problems. We're not being unrealistic. We want to be realistic. So things like being grounded in the present, what's happening right now, being positive, like yes, it does suck that we don't get to play soccer right now, and I'm looking forward to when we can again. And what do you think that's going to be like, right? So it is going to happen at some point. Change is inevitable.

Things will shift, but allowing and practicing how to see the hopefulness in what's coming, and also another piece that I often introduce around this is gratitude. So how do we practice gratitude in our moments? So you know what's happening right now that we can be grateful for, and that can be big things like where we live and our great healthcare and the family that we have, but it can be little things like I ate a delicious peanut butter and jelly sandwich today, or I was walking into the elevator and, or I was walking down the street and somebody smiled at me and I was a total stranger, but it was a lovely smile, right? That could be something that we're grateful for.

So a lot of families do this at the dinner table or before bed, because that's also a great protective factor. So, in thinking about building resilience in children and youth, we're thinking about how do we foster strong relationships with trusted adults. How do we help children manage big emotions and know what to do when they're feeling those big emotions. How do we teach flexibility in problem solving, encouraging children to be self competent, feel good about themselves, notice what their strengths are, and finally fostering optimism in children in youth. You do have within the PDF that you were able to download. There are some pages of resources that you can access, but we'll go on to questions right now.

[Staff Member, 45:06-45:23](#)

I can get started with the questions we've had some come in during the discussion. The first one is for Diane. Diane, you say that resilience can be learned, which is very reassuring. But I don't know where to start. I've developed some really negative patterns of self-talk. How can I change this?

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 45:25-46:36](#)

Well, I think that's a really-it's a great question, and I would suggest. And when I usually when I talk about resilience, I talk about picking one problem. So if you're feeling overwhelmed, for instance, what are all the reasons? Which one do I have control over, and of those ones, which is the one that's causing me the most distress? And for me, when I think about feeling overwhelmed at work, then my brain naturally goes to email, and then I take that one piece and I go for the low-hanging fruit.



What are the things I can do with email to make a difference? And those little steps that you take, you eat that elephant one bite at a time. Actually, some of the starting steps are some of the hardest, but often the most impactful. So go for the low-hanging fruit. Don't worry if it's a small piece, and look to the people around you to ask questions or go online and see what you can find about how people overcame email, set up teen norms; those kinds of things. Those can once you have success in one piece of that, then you're going to feel like okay, that was a win. Now let's go on to the next challenge that I have.

But you need some wins early on, so that's why I say go to the low-hanging fruit and absolutely things you can control in your life.

[Staff Member, 46:42-47:02](#)

Thanks, Diane. Just as a reminder to everyone, feel free to pop your question into the Q and A, and we'll read them aloud and get an answer for you. The next question is for Susan. What do you suggest I do to help my partner get on the same page about dealing with our child's anxiety? We both handle things a little differently.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 47:04-47:58](#)

That's very, very common. It's very-I mean, you're two individual people with their own histories and their own feelings around anxiety, and it's very common for two parents to kind of have different tendencies towards parenting. So usually, you know, I think that it's a balance of finding, like, recognizing what you bring to the table and what your partner brings, because usually both bring some strengths in managing some of those difficult situations, and so like approaching it from a recognizing the strengths of each of you.

But then I think the next step is kind of, you know, having both people either read or potentially even work with someone if your child is quite anxious, so that you have some guidance from somebody who's kind of guiding you in what's the best way to manage some of those things for your child.

[Staff Member, 48:02-48:16](#)

Thank you. Next question that's come in. It could be for either of you. How do you differentiate between negative thoughts that are based on fears or biases and those that may be valid? Is there a way to confirm which is which?

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 48:19-48:20](#)

Susan, why don't you go ahead with that one.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 48:21-49:09](#)

Sure. So my gut reaction to that was it doesn't actually matter because if you're having negative thoughts and you're dwelling on them, they're not helping you. So in in my kid and teen world, I'm talking about those as unhelpful thoughts.



We know a lot of people think that if you worry about something that might happen, it will prepare you for when it actually does happen. And actually, the literature shows very clearly that your time spent worrying does not actually help you be more effective when you're faced with that. So generally, worry time and focusing on negative thoughts is kind of wasted time in a lot of ways. So if you can learn to recognize those for what they are and let them go, you'll be better off.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 49:11-49:50](#)

And again, back to the sort of low-hanging fruit or little steps that help you to win that race is just having an awareness that you have those thoughts, and when they pop into your head, confronting them yourself, and that's what a great CBT therapist can help you with is actually identifying those negative thoughts and helping you work on confronting them. What's the reality? What's the evidence behind that? But you can do some of that yourself just by having an awareness. That's pretty negative thought. When I have that, I'm going to try to stop myself from saying that to myself and turn it around, or or stop myself from speaking in such a negative way. That starts you on that path.

[Staff Member, 49:54-50:10](#)

Great, thank you. The next one is for you, Diane. The chronic, unpredictable stress of COVID. Has had a major impact on my motivation to take care of myself. My physical health and sometimes mental health is suffering. How can I regain motivation to address my physical health?

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 50:12-51:34](#)

Well, I would say first and foremost that if you're really struggling with your motivation and you're worried about how your mental health is suffering, please reach out to someone, whether it's your family doctor, your nurse practitioner, or perhaps a therapist, so that you make sure that you're not actually suffering from anxiety or depression that's having an impact on your motivation. When we're when we're struggling with a mental illness, pretty much any kind of mental illness, it can impact your cognition, the way that you think, the way that your brain functions, as far as your ability to concentrate, pay attention, but also your motivation.

So it could be a symptom that you've actually developed depression or anxiety, and having that treated can help you to regain your motivation. But again, this has absolutely been a difficult time, and I hear you taking little steps, not expecting that you're going to be able to do that four minute mile right away.

Getting out for that, even if you know 30 minutes is enough to grow brain cells, but hey, 15 minutes will do. Making sure that when you're going to the grocery store, just being mindful of the choices that you're making for your gut and how that will impact your brain. All of those little pieces that slowly add up, but do reach out there. I want to reassure everyone there is always a path ahead, and sometimes we need help to find that path.



[Staff Member, 51:37-51:50](#)

Thanks, Diane. Next one for Susan. Is there a specific age group in children that may be more prone to certain stressors? And on the flip side, are there other age groups that data shows are able to cope with stress better?

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 51:53-53:16](#)

That's a good question. I don't know that I have the data per se on that, but I would say, from my clinical experience, that you know, like for example, COVID stresses, teens are definitely having a much harder time, and a lot of that has to do with isolation. That the teen years are, in particular, very socially driven. It is very normal for these ages for teens to be differentiating, leaving the home, spending more time with friends, less time with their parents, and the way that COVID has made that difficult has been very, very challenging on teens' mental health. I'd say developmentally also there's the aspect of stress and understanding stress, so at different ages, kids are at younger ages. For example, a lot of kids are not very aware of all the stresses they're maybe feeling when they're younger.

Their mom and dad are maybe stressed, but they're not always cognitively aware of kind of all of the impacts when they're younger, and that cognitive development of their brains being able to see the potential, the risks, and think about things in that way develops as they get older. So I'd say as you get older, you're better able to understand those stresses and therefore react to them developmentally.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 53:17-54:12](#)

If I can add to that, Susan, that most serious mental illnesses have their onset in the teen years, and that's important to remember that there's a variety of stressors at that time. As you said, there's hormones, there's the good and the evil of social media, the style of parenting, some sometimes the snowplow parenting, and then kids hit that age of having more responsibility and aren't able to cope. And one of the critical things I believe we need to do is start to just like sex education, starting in kindergarten with this is my body, these are the different parts, I own this, other people shouldn't touch this, is what's normal and what's not, because I think we're really struggling now, kids and their parents.

When someone says, "I'm anxious, what does anxiety mean? What does that mean? When is it important? When do I need help? And so, having that awareness, that education, I think, is critically important, and it needs to start sooner than it does now.

[Staff Member, 54:17-54:29](#)

Thank you. Next one for you, Diane. I'm worried about my partner's mental health, and I'm glad I was able to attend this talk to learn more. Wondering how I can help him find help. I don't know where to start.



[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 54:30-55:42](#)

Well, I think there's two things. One is just expressing your concern to your partner, and but not in a way that you know leads to conflict, which may sometimes be challenging, but just saying things like "I'm worried about you" and asking "How can I help? Sometimes people, when they become very ill, actually lose their insight. They don't even recognize how challenging things are. But that would be the first foray: is how can I help you?

And that's with everyone, not just your partner. The best place. To start, when you're worried about a loved one within your family, is with your family practitioner, with a nurse practitioner, and that doesn't have to be your own. But going through a virtual care network or going to a walk-in clinic, most family practitioners and certainly nurse practitioners very adept at being able to diagnose a mental illness and help to drive you in the right direction, depending on the severity. Not everyone requires medication.

Some people benefit just from talk therapy. Some people need just more exercise and a little more support in their life. So that that job of the family practitioner, nurse practitioner, can be very helpful in helping you to qualify the severity and start on the right path.

[Staff Member, 55:45-56:03](#)

Thanks, Diane. Next one for Susan. Do you have any advice on how to help a young child cope better with their emotions when stressed or anxious, where those emotions present themselves in yelling and physical outbursts, and in challenging their parents when a timeout is imposed, for example.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 56:05-57:39](#)

So there's lots of different strategies depending on the age of the child. Like I'd say, if they're kind of in that five or six to 10 year old range, I often recommend the book. There's a book series called What to Do When, so there's What to Do When Your Temper Flares, and it's a great book that I actually use with a lot of kids too, where it kind of talks about anger and those big emotions as a fire, and what do you do to make a fire bigger? What are the things you do to make a campfire go out. You have to take away oxygen.

You have to smother it. You don't add fuel to the fire, and it uses that metaphor throughout on tools for how do you do things like cool yourself off, like taking a break or cooling your thoughts. So, what are hot, angry thoughts, and what are cool thoughts? And it's nice because you can draw in the book, you can write, you can do pictures, so that can be a good one that parents can work on with their children to kind of help them. And the number one thing I always recommend to parents when you have a child who's getting really upset and angry and big emotions is to try to stay calm and grounded the whole time you're dealing.



So because it's very hard as a parent if your child is yelling at you. They are pushing, pushing, pushing, and at some point you may burst. And if you can kind of time yourself out, take a break, tag team with your spouse, so that you're staying calm. Modeling that and staying calm will always help the situation come down quicker.

[Staff Member, 57:41-57:53](#)

Thank you. Next question about teenagers: What can we do to encourage a teen to look after themselves when they believe they don't need your help and they're doing fine? Susan, go ahead.

[Dr. Susan Siklos, 57:54-59:39](#)

I mean, so many teens feel that way, and especially when it's parent-directed, going, I don't think you're doing well. Teams will often say, "What do you know? You don't know me. You don't understand. And you know, I don't know how many of you remember being a teen. Like I, you know, I thought my parents didn't know a lot too.

So that's pretty normal. And so I think it's always about maintaining communication and relationship with your team to gently talk about what you're noticing. If you notice, you know, inner calm, not in a fight, not in a, but just be like, hey, it seems like you're feeling more sad lately or you're more stressed. Like, how are you doing? And the thing with things like therapy and stuff is that a team has to be ready for it and see that they need it and want it, but sometimes they'll seek it out outside of that parent suggesting it. Right, so I think just dropping like, hey, there's if you want like we have, and waiting for them to feel ready because a big piece is feeling ready, and sometimes it really truly comes from a team talking to a friend who is also seeing a counselor.

We have places like here in British Columbia, we have Foundry where teams can drop in and see a counselor. So I think it's just kind of gently letting them know what you see, and letting them know that you're there and that you're happy to support them, and and you know, doing some of those healthy things that are good, like going for a walk together or doing any of those things they're willing to do, and ideally, you know, waiting until that they're ready to try and get some of that help. As long as they're not significantly ill, and then you have to take different steps.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 59:40-1:01:00](#)

I know we only have less than a minute left, but I did see a question about diet, and I just wanted to answer that very quickly to say you cannot yoga your way out of a serious depression, nor can you eat your way out of a serious mental illness, but these are augmentation strategies that can be incredibly helpful, and where. The data is with diet because that was one of the early questions I saw. Is the Mediterranean diet? And there's actually some really interesting data saying supporting the the support that a Mediterranean diet has on maintaining mental wellness and supporting recovery from depression. So whole grains, veggies, fruits, legumes, seeds, keeping chicken, fish to a couple times a week, meat, sweets, less. It's the bread, cereal, rice, pasta that drive inflammation, and so trying to keep those to a minimum really important.



And also, Susan, I know this is in your wheelhouse, trying to eat as a family as often as possible. It's an incredibly important time to to speak to your kids in a in a non confrontational meal setting, and people don't do that as much anymore. But it really is important for developing those relationships with your kids where they want to tell you things.

Thanks, Grant. Thank you so much.

[Erin Mills, 1:01:00-1:01:14](#)

Yeah. Thank you. I think we're at the end of our questions now. Sorry for jumping in there. I just I know that we're at the end of the session today. We're at time. Is there any other any other questions, or shall we close off?

[Staff Member, 1:01:14-1:01:16](#)

No. Over to you to close.

[Erin Mills, 1:01:16-1:01:40](#)

Okay. Perfect. That was great. That was we can certainly that resonates with all of us. All of those messages and insight-it's fantastic. Thank you very much to Dr. McIntosh and Dr. Sickles for a very well-timed and relevant presentation. And thank you to all of you for joining us today. And of course, a huge thank you to Telus Health for partnering with the Conference Board of Canada on this very important initiative. We hope to see you again. Thank you very much, and goodbye for now.

[Dr. Diane McIntosh, 1:01:40-1:01:41](#)

Thank you.