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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

### **More online options for students to support social, emotional well-being**

VICTORIA – New, free virtual educational programs for students, parents and educators are supporting social and emotional well-being as part of navigating the new world of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We know that children and families are feeling anxiety and uncertainty during these challenging times, and it’s important we provide resources to help them thrive,” said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. “These new learning tools for students, families and educators offer interactive lessons to support their health and well-being.”

The free, virtual WE Well-being program was recently launched as part of the new WE Schools @home program. Accessible for grades K-12 in both English and French, the program is aimed at youth who are experiencing anxiety and social isolation. It places a special emphasis on WE Well-being online learning, including social-emotional learning and resiliency.

Developed in collaboration with B.C. educators, the Ministry of Education and University of British Columbia and mental health professionals, the program provides educators with curriculum resources for students in elementary schools that cover self-awareness and personal responsibility, with plans to expand to high schools. The program was launched in 2018 as a pilot and has involved over 3,500 students, 150 educators, 43 schools and 11 school districts to date.

Also available to parents and caregivers is the new EASE (Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators) at Home program. Activities focus on tips and strategies parents can use with their children to create calming routines, help them talk about difficult emotions and manage their anxiety. Kits have been developed for grades K-3 and 4-7 and provide five weeks of activities, with a different game or story for each day. Activities are research based and proven to help younger children calm themselves, learn relaxation techniques and understand their worries.

“This is a difficult time, especially for children and youth who are safely distancing from friends and relatives and who may be feeling stressed or anxious from all the recent changes in their lives,” said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development. “These new EASE at Home resources will provide parents with simple activities that they can model for their kids and include in daily routines.”

The WE Well-being and EASE at Home materials complement the recent Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions announcement of \$5 million to expand existing mental-health programs and launch new services to support British Columbians around COVID-19. One focus of the funding is a new virtual clinic that will make Foundry services available around the province for young people aged 12 to 24 years and their families through voice, video and chat.

“This crisis is taking a toll on the mental health of British Columbians of all ages, including young people and their families,” said Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “This new resource is great news for students who are missing connections with friends and teachers, parents who are adapting to the needs of their children in new ways, and educators who are working hard to support both the academic and emotional well-being of their students.”

#### **Quotes:**

##### **Craig Kielburger, co-founder, WE –**

“In our isolation, protecting our community’s physical health presents challenges for mental health and well-being. Our goal is to support youth well-being through cost-free digital resources and content that complement distance education with a focus on self care and social-emotional learning. By making these resources easy to use for students, we hope to take some burden off the shoulders of busy parents and teachers.”

##### **Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, professor, faculty of education, University of British Columbia –**

“Rarely before in our recent history have we seen such an urgent need for an explicit and intentional focus on supporting the well-being of our children, their families and our educators. B.C.’s Ministry of Education is a leader in the world through its steadfast attention to mental health in schools and its curricular competencies that integrate the promotion of students' personal and social competence, both which are informed from the latest science on well-being. The WE Well-being and WE Schools @home programs provide a perfect alignment with B.C.’s focus, because the WE organization has distilled the latest research into evidence-based practical approaches and resources that integrate social and emotional learning and the cultivation of positive human qualities, including empathy, gratitude, compassion altruism and resilience – those qualities that are essential for well-being.”

#### **Quick Facts:**

- Early signs of anxiety can be missed when children struggle with internal worries and physical distress. Some children are at greater risk of developing an anxiety disorder, which affects up to 4% of B.C. children and youth.
- WE Schools is offered in over 1,160 schools and groups in British Columbia, with more than 1,000 schools and 300,000 students engaged.
- The WE Schools @home program is connected to the long-standing, free-service learning program WE Schools, which is provided to over 18,000 schools across North America and globally.
- EASE was developed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in consultation with Anxiety Canada to be a tangible and practical approach to supporting social and emotional learning and building the capacity of K-7 educators.
- EASE at Home is also being shared with Indigenous service providers, First Nations Schools Association and the First Nations Education Steering Committee.
  - For parents with kids who also need the guidance of a mental-health clinician, contact your local Child and Youth Mental Health office for support.

#### **Learn More:**

Learn more about the WE Well-being program: <https://www.we.org/en-CA/get-doing/activities-and-resources/wellbeing/>

Learn more about the WE Schools @home program: <https://www.we.org/en-CA/our-work/we-schools/at-home/>

EASE at Home offers helpful tips for parents, like how to teach children calming breathing techniques or use structured games like scavenger hunts to build routine in a way that's fun: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health/ease>

The Ministry of Education's Erase strategy was expanded to include mental health: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase>

For more information about available child and mental-health supports and contact information, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health/mental-health-intake-clinics>

The Ministry of Education's new Keep Learning site has resources for parents to support positive mental health under the "Keeping Healthy" tab: <https://www.openschool.bc.ca/keeplearning/>

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