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## Ready for Reconnection! News from UIC

Hello to all our member companies, member employees and families! Thanks for taking a few minutes to enjoy this summer's LIVE WORK WELL newsletter, and we hope that the summer finds you living and working well!

As we all ease forward towards reduced COVID restrictions, we are re-learning how to reconnect in so many ways. This process can be more difficult than we might have anticipated, which is why we chose it as our theme for this newsletter. Early 2020 we started working really hard at adjusting to disconnection and isolation. In that process, many of us eventually found some peace and comfort with it - our quiet COVID groove perhaps. And now we are facing major adjustments again - recalibrating our social meters toward closeness and connection once more. Are we going "back to before"? Or perhaps navigating a new future that allows us so many more freedoms and comforts carefully balanced with health precautions and other COVID lessons learned. We wish you well with all your adjustments toward reconnection; returning to work, spending time with friends and family, traveling, getting out to events and local venues, entertaining at home, and many more.

Here at UIC, we are excited to reconnect with our clients and the public, and welcome you back through our doors as of September 1st. On September 1st BC moves to phase 4 of restrictions, indoor masks become optional, and more people will be fully vaccinated. As we usually sit 4-7 feet apart in counselling, we decided that masks were not ideal for counselling, where emotions and expressions are a big part of the process. Instead we've been very busy holding virtual face-to-face sessions over Zoom since March 2020 and have been pleased with how effective this method of counselling has been. After September 1st, Zoom sessions will remain an option to you, should you prefer to continue this way. We are so pleased that Zoom provides a simple option for all of our clients, but particularly those outside of Campbell River who value that face-to-face visual (rather than telephone). We are glad to have this option available to all our members and clients in Port McNeill, Port Hardy, Comox Valley, and Gold River areas.

In other news, we would like to extend a warm and overdue welcome to the newest members of our clinical team, Holly Kleban and Gabrielle Durupt. Holly is a full-time counsellor who brings over 13 years of experience working in mental health and addictions and has been with us since January 1st, shortly after arriving in Campbell River. It's been a pleasure having Holly on our team. Our staff, and Holly's many clients are so appreciative of her skills, experience, and compassionate nature. Gabrielle joined us in December 2020 as a counselling intern while completing a practicum for her Masters in Counselling Psychology degree. Gabrielle's practicum ends in August and she will be staying with us for an extended internship through January 2022. We are all grateful to know that the calming compassion she brings to her work will extend another 6 months, until Cheryl Close returns from leave.

Please visit our website for more information about Holly, Gabrielle, or our other counselling staff.

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## Reconnecting with Community & Personal Well-being

As we begin to see glimpses of the COVID-19 pandemic waning, we may want to pause and take stock of some of the ways in which the past year and a half has impacted our lives, as well as the things we want to cultivate in our lives going forward. For many people, a major impact has been the restrictions that have been placed on our social lives.

Humans are inherently social beings. We do not thrive in isolation, but live best when we are a part of a community. For many people, the social restrictions of the pandemic have significantly impeded their ability to participate in various forms of community. As such, it's valuable to consider, how would you like to be a part of different communities in the post-pandemic world?

Following are three ways that community can promote personal well-being, and three factors to consider when trying to find a community that feels right for you.

### Three Ways Community Promotes Personal Well-being

A community is not just a group of people; it also involves a feeling of connection. When we feel connected, we are set up to experience well-being in our lives. There are many positive aspects of feeling connected within a community – here are just a few:

**Belonging.** Feeling a sense of belonging is one of the greatest benefits of being part of a healthy community. Importantly though, belonging that promotes well-being is different than conformity. Healthy belonging means being able to be your authentic self while still feeling welcome. It means you don't have to change yourself to fit in.

**Support.** Knowing you have others you can count on when you need support is another positive aspect of community. You know you are not alone. This promotes a sense of safety and security and provides a firm foundation from which to thrive.

**Purpose.** Being part of a community involves both giving and receiving. You know you can count on others, and others can count on you. There are needs that invariably arise in communities and we all have different abilities and resources we can contribute. Contributing in this way fosters a sense of life purpose and meaning, which are key aspects of mental health and well-being.

### 3 Ways to Find Community

Finding the right community for you will likely require some self-reflection. Following are three areas of consideration to help you clarify what is important to you when it comes to community.

**Interests.** Having common interests with those around you can be a key part of a fulfilling community experience. What do you enjoy doing? What are you passionate about? What activities make you lose track of time? What do you enjoy sharing with others?

**Values.** Our values are essential parts of who we are as individuals and shared values can help create meaningful communities. What feels bigger than you as an individual that you would like to be a part of? This could involve charitable or volunteer work, or simply being connected to a meaningful cause.

**Beliefs.** This could be religious in nature, but does not need to be. For instance, you could also find a group that supports your belief that science will save the world, that a certain political party will fix your society, or that Bigfoot is out there somewhere. There is no one-size-fits all when it comes to community. Luckily though, there are many different communities out there that each of us can be a part of. Whatever the case may be for you, it can be helpful to remember that mental health and well-being is strengthened by the experiences of belonging, support and purpose that communities can provide.





## **A Parenting Plan to Recover and Reconnect our Kids**

With some semblance of normalcy on the horizon, many of us are starting to think about what life is going to look like on the other side. And while Covid-19 has unquestionably impacted us all, our children have arguably felt the impact more than most. The last year and a half has felt like forever to some grown-ups, so try to imagine how the younger humans among us feel. Remember how long summer break felt when you were a kid? Now multiply that by 8; eight summers worth of Covid. Yikes! Not only has the time inevitably felt longer for our children, but restrictions have likely felt more challenging and the uncertainty more worrisome. Everything just feels bigger when you're little. As we transition into a more normal routine (yay!), there are ways to help your kids find their footing in the post-pandemic world while helping to stabilize and improve their mental health.

### **Arrange social play time:**

Old habits and routines are likely to feel a bit rusty as we emerge from Covid-land, and your children may need a little bit of help to re-engage socially with their pals. Make the effort to set up playdates for your younger kids, and provide plenty of opportunities and encouragement for your teens to engage with their peers – in real life! While some of us can't wait to get back out there, others are finding that what once felt normal now seems daunting. This is true for kids too! All the more reason to encourage and arrange these sorts of social forays to help them feel comfortable again. Social play has huge benefits for kids including sparking imagination and creativity, and increasing self-esteem and self-confidence. And a confident kid is more likely to take on and master new challenges – for instance navigating a post-covid world.

### **Get them outside:**

Did you know that even 5 minutes in the forest can have positive health benefits? It's been shown to improve mood, boost the immune system, reduce stress and improve sleep. And for kids, even those with ADHD, it helps improve concentration and their ability to focus. In fact, studies have shown that kids who spend more time outside are happier and more relaxed, and have better short-term memory and cognitive skills too! What better way to help our children decompress from all the stress of the last year and a half? It's also a great way to get kids more active, and you can even make it social. Meet friends at the beach, hike together, picnic together, camp together! With summer in full swing your kids are more likely to jump in with both feet...pun intended!

### **Talk it out:**

While things are definitely feeling more "normal", your kids may still have some fears and questions moving forward when it comes to Covid. The world is full of mixed messages and misinformation, now more than ever. Encourage them to talk to you, and continue to create safe spaces to express thoughts and feelings. The more you can validate and normalize any anxiety your children may be experiencing, the easier it will be for them to move through it and carry on. Remember, name it to tame it!

As parents, we've undoubtedly been doing our best to support our little ones, but sometimes it's hard to know if we've done enough. Research has shown that quarantine measures during the pandemic could have disproportionate impacts on children and their future mental health – studies indicate that the experience of social isolation and loneliness in childhood increases the

Online  
Resources



For additional resources:

<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-manage-post-covid-anxiety-0>

[https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/calm\\_breathing.pdf](https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/calm_breathing.pdf)

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/ToleratingUncertainty.pdf>

<https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210428/anxiety-and-anticipation-rejoining-a-post-covid-world>

<https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>

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## A Parenting Plan to Recover and Reconnect our Kids (cont'd)

risk of depression up to 9 years later in healthy children – and this can feel scary. The good news is, these same studies also tell us that early intervention is the best way to mitigate potential negative outcomes. Just be present, be patient, and remember, if things don't seem to be moving in the right direction, don't be afraid to ask for help.

If you're feeling concerned about your kids, and the toll that COVID has taken on their mental health, here are some signs to watch for. If you're seeing these signs, reach out to your family physician or counsellor for help.

### Signs of mental illness in toddlers and young children:

- Backward progress in developmental milestones
- Increased fussiness and irritability
- More frequent night-waking
- Feeding issues or stomach pains
- Increased separation anxiety, or more "clingy"
- More frequent and intense tantrums
- Aggressive themes during play
- Regression with bedwetting

### Signs of mental illness in older children and teens:

- Changes in mood that are out of the ordinary
- Increased conflict with friends and family
- Changes in behaviour, including a loss of interest in things they previously enjoyed
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Changes in appetite, weight or eating habits
- Less interest in schoolwork or a drop in academic performance
- An increase in risky or dangerous behaviour, such as alcohol or drug use
- Talk of self-harm or suicide

*I love being with my family, feeling that I'm both protector and protected. - Unknown*



Welcome to our newest counsellors, Holly Kleban and Gabrielle Durupt.