



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

**Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Monday, 26 October 2020

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Priority: **HIGH**

### **Family Services reminds the public that counselling support is available as the country continues to navigate COVID-19**

*Friday October 9, 2020* --- Following the recent announcements by the Prime Minister that several public spaces like places of worship and our beaches, as well as the resumption of all Government Officers, particularly in our public transport system; we are now required to be much more vigilant in complying with the health and safety advice provided by the Ministry of Health, to contain the spread of COVID-19. The National Family Services Division (NFSD), an arm of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) which aims to empower citizens to lead progressive lives through healthy functional families, reminds the public that counselling services and psycho social support continue to be made available by the Division.

According to NFSD's Assistant Director, Kathleen Sarkar, "While the pandemic has encouraged families to spend more time together, it has also made room for quite a number of negatives to seep in, as the COVID-19 experience has somewhat exacerbated the situation". NFSD's Coordinator, Sharon Winchester cited that issues such as depression, anxiety and in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts may tend to be amplified by the implications of the virus given new and existing problems being faced by individuals and families. Such problems include but are not limited to loss of income, reduced income and in some instances, adjustments in family and work routines which are negatively impacting marriages and other familial relations.

The Ministry, through the NFSD therefore continues to provide support through all of its social welfare offices at various locations throughout the country, to ensure talk therapy, over the phone is used, as the initial intervention method, while those requiring referrals are also connected to the relevant agencies, whenever necessary. Additionally, the NFSD is committed to hosting its virtual sessions to aid in lessening the mental and emotional impacts which the pandemic has caused.

Some online workshop topics will include Parenting Tips and the recently introduced workshops targeting men. According to Sarkar "We were quite pleased with the turnout of men for our recent sessions and although they (men) appeared particularly quiet in the early part, by the end of it, they were fully interactive and left feeling more comfortable in voicing their opinions and getting themselves heard. Realizing the success of this, NFSD plans to host similar sessions in the near future where men can have the opportunity to dialogue on similar issues and find practical solutions to help cope with stress and other challenges they have, and continue to encounter during COVID- 19.

Within the upcoming six months, given the anticipated fall outs due to financial strain for Christmas and the impending cancellation of Carnival - a time when many seek stress relief; the NFSD plans to host more support sessions to those who may require the support and service.

In closing, both Sarkar and Winchester while stressing the importance of spending more quality time with family members, also spoke to remembering to allocate time for self and for leisure activities. Accordingly, there is also the importance of proper communication in the homes, spending quality time with children, and in the instances of parents being separated, the need to develop and maintain proper co-parenting relationships.

Most importantly though, persons are encouraged to pay attention to legitimate sources of COVID-19 precautions given particularly by the Ministry of Health, i.e., wash your hands, sanitize, wear your mask and maintain social and physical distances.

Persons in need of counselling services may contact the National Family Services Division at 623 – 2608; Ext 6701 – 7.



*Fig. 1 - Minister of Social Development and Family Services Senator the Honourable Donna Cox meet with staff of the National Family Services Division.*

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