



Covid Mental Health Tips for Teens



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Mental health issues are a growing concern for today's teens. During the pandemic, the problem is worse.

Many are struggling with greater mental health effects because of this "new normal." Disrupted routines, uncertainty, worry about world events, separation from friends and peers and second-hand stress from parents and adults around them are all compounding their stress levels.

In a national survey of more than 1,500 teens, seven out of 10 teens said they are experiencing mental health effects from the pandemic. This survey was completed in May; the effects are likely greater after several more months of coronavirus uncertainty.

Findings, published in Huffpost.com, include:

More than half said they'd experienced anxiety, 45% said they'd felt excess stress, and 43% identified that they'd struggled with depression.

For some context, roughly 12% of American teens meet diagnostic criteria for depression, and roughly 30% generally meet criteria for having an anxiety disorder by the time they are 18, although that data is by no means identical.

"It is clear to us, based on the survey findings, that COVID-19 has had a measurable adverse impact on teens' mental health," said Jennifer Sirangelo, president and CEO of 4-H. "For example, 61% of teens said that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their feelings of loneliness."

<https://bit.ly/2Gkonrp>

Mental health tips for teens

This is a tough time for everyone, but teens and younger kids may be grieving the loss of normal activities, milestones and their friend/support groups. And they do not have highly developed coping skills to help them through these feelings.

Mental health professionals have published teen-specific mental health tips for teens who may be feeling a negative impact from the current environment. These tips, from UNICEF, include strategies for a new (temporary) normal. <https://uni.cf/2Gvgtv0>

1. Recognize that your anxiety is completely normal

Your feelings are also a "new normal" for you. If school closures and alarming headlines are making you feel anxious, you are not the only one, and your stress is normal. Stress can actually be productive by creating greater awareness of the situation to help shape decisions.

Remember that communication is essential. If you have symptoms, speak to your parents and seek medical guidance. Do some research about the virus, but be sure the sources are reliable. Follow standard health advice on hand-washing, social distancing and masks.

2. Create distractions

According to psychologists, a helpful response is to divide a difficult problem into two categories: things you can do something about and things you can do nothing about. Create a sense of empowerment by identifying tasks that may help improve things and things you are powerless to change. It can be very freeing to let go of worry that you have no responsibility for and no ability to change. After you have dissected the source of your stress, it may help to engage in a distracting activity, such as homework, reading or watching a favorite movie.

3. Find new ways to connect with your friends

Your friends are extremely important. During social distancing, social media can help fill the connection gap. Find ways to group chat, video conference and spend virtual time together. While it doesn't replace in-person socializing, it can be a good substitute if you observe healthy limits. Too much social media can add to anxiety.

4. Focus on you

A positive of the pandemic is the extra time you have to focus on learning something new. Take this opportunity to explore new interests. Learn an instrument, practice painting, read more books or start to code. You may already have projects, or you can find an online tutorial for almost any new skill. Focusing on yourself and finding ways to use your time is a productive way to look after your mental health.

5. Feel your feelings

Missing out on activities with friends, school events, or sports matches is disappointing. Experts say the best way to deal with this disappointment is to let yourself feel it. If you're sad, let yourself feel sad. It is not comfortable, but it isn't fatal either. Try to observe your emotions, so you can understand and process them. There is no right way. Do whatever feels right to you.

6. Be kind to yourself and others

Remember that we are all in the same boat. We are all sharing this experience and trying to navigate life changes, uncertainty and fear or worry. It is helpful to remember that others need the same compassion and empathy that we need. Treat others with kindness and do what you can to stand up to bullying behavior toward others.

Online classrooms may offer new ways for some kids to be targets of the bullies. In new school online programs, classroom management is still a work in progress. If teachers don't catch some of the hurtful comments during class, be a bystander against bullying. Kids who are being bullied need other kids to stand up for them. If you know a friend is being bullied, offer support. You can make a difference.