



COVID19 Coping Strategies for Teens

None of us have done this before. We have never had our schools cancelled, our relationships paused, or our concerts and sporting events indefinitely suspended. However, what we do know can be helpful in this circumstance. Some things to remember:

Anxiety in response to this big event is expected. Let's have our anxiety be helpful in increasing our awareness of where we can be responsible for ourselves and make a plan for caring for ourselves and supporting those we love. Important tools:

- **Fact checking:** Fact check to notice if your emotional response matches what the information tells us (e.g. Fact: in other countries with COVID19 they have not had issues with supplies in grocery stores so... it is not our most mindful response to take more than we need for a few weeks from the grocery store)
- **Expect emotion:** Remember that new things can cause big emotional responses in all of us but as we get used to those new things, our emotional responses settle over time (e.g. Remember the first day of school, or the first time you performed in a concert or game? It might have been overwhelming at first, but it became easier the more you did it)
- **We are all in this boat together!** Keeping compassion that all of us are making big adjustments in our lives can help us practice patience with each other. Remember that stressors are high for everyone right now. The more you can keep your cool, empathize with others, and stay positive, the more that those around you will as well.
- **Know your role:** Read up on government recommendations to learn about what is your responsibility. It can be easy to fight with your parents rather than focus on all of you needing to respect what the government is recommending.

Focus on what you can control.....rather than overfocusing on the things that you can't control

- Make a plan for your day (see below)
- Focus on your plan to be socially responsible (practice good hygiene, keep social distancing)



- Consider how you can support loved ones or neighbors (Could you pick up groceries for your 70 year old neighbor? Could you pick up your grandparents' prescription and drop it at their doorway? Could you video chat a quarantined friend and sing them a song or play a game with them?)
- Limit the time watching TV or reading the news
- When you start thinking about things out of your control – such as how long this will last – redirect your attention to the things that you can control.
- Think about the positives from this situation. What have you been able to do that you wouldn't normally do?
- Set some goals: You are all of a sudden in charge of your own schooling, or at least have more flexibility than usual. What 1-2 things can you focus your time and attention on that is of interest to you?
- Talk to your friends and family: Use the support around you to build strength during this time
- Journal: Write down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This experience will go down in history, and it will be nice to be able to reflect first hand on what this experience was like for you
- Build community: Stay connected to those you care about. Be creative- how can you guys still join together without being in person?
- Use technology: You have been brought up with more technology than any other generation. Use this to your advantage- connect with your friends, your school, your teammates- and help your loved ones (parents, grandparents) adjust to their new jobs and world by giving them some "pro tips."
- Do what you love to do, just differently: Love to get your nails done? Make time for a self-manicure. Love to play soccer? Figure out how to make it happen in your backyard or house.



Talking to your teens about COVID

Many parents are struggling to adjust to our new world, which has been changed in a matter of days or weeks. We don't have all of the answers, so it is hard to know how to talk to our teenagers. Here are a few tips:

- **Start the conversation.** So many things have changed recently, and your teens are in the thick of that. Hiding it or talking around the topic won't be helpful. Instead, tell your teen that you are interested in talking. Pick a time that works for both of you and sit down for a conversation.
- **Show interest in their experience:** Introduce the topic- "There have been a lot of changes around here with the coronavirus. I know it has changed my life significantly, and I want to hear about how things have changed for you." Rule of thumb: Ask more than you tell. Be interested in their unique experience and rely on open ended questions (those that cannot end with a yes/no) to help them share.
- **Move beyond initial push back:** It might be natural for teens to make a joke, brush it off, or not want to talk initially. Know that this is developmentally appropriate, and that they are trying to find their own identity- independent of what you think and feel- while they navigate their experience of COVID. Giving a gentle, "I know it can be hard to talk about, and if you don't want to talk to me, that's okay. I just want to make sure you have someone to talk to, and I want you to know that I see how much this has changed your life" or "Okay. Just know that I am thinking about you, and I am ready to talk if you want to."
- **Respect their privacy:** At this stage, adolescents tend to talk more to their friends than they might to their parents. While this isn't true in every case, you can be sure that your teens are eager to talk to their friends about what is going on. Just because this is a different topic doesn't mean we need new rules. Providing teenagers with privacy around their intimate thoughts and feelings helps honor where they are in their developmental process.
- **Create space:** Teens are used to having much more independence than they do right now. Be creative about how they can have their own time and space within your home.
- **Validate their experience:** If they are talking, be sure to validate their experience. For adults, it may not seem as significant to have a dance cancelled, a concert missed, or to not be able to spend time with friends. But these experiences are significant to teens, and it is important to honor that rather than try to compare it to others. Provide empathy, e.g. "I hear you, that is so disappointing."
- **Rely on the facts:** There is a lot of information out there right now. It is best to rely on facts: Use the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website, or the World Health Organization (WHO) website as "expert" information. Encourage your teen to check facts that they hear from friends or on social media with these expert sites.



- **Admit when you don't know:** It is okay to not have the answers. You can share that "I don't know the answer to that, and other people don't seem to know either. I have some guesses, but we cannot be sure." You can also follow up with some things you do know. "What I do know is that we are doing everything right to protect ourselves."
- **Enforcing the rules:** Adolescents are at an egocentric time period of their lives, meaning that they tend to think about their own experiences first. It may be hard for them to understand the community aspect of the recent restrictions. Try to use personal examples, ones that you know that will matter to your teen. For example, you can give an example of a grandparent or someone you know with a weaker immune system. Personalizing it can help teens recognize the importance of playing by the rules.
- **Giving to others:** Another way to address a teen's tendency toward self-focus can be to identify others who need support. Giving to the community can help broaden their perspective, and can help reinforce what you are trying to convey.
- **Be creative with milestones:** It is very upsetting for teens to be disconnected from their friends and important milestones in their lives- prom, possible graduation, sporting seasons, concerts and birthdays. Find ways to help them celebrate these milestones in a different way (e.g. Using video, sending things to friends in the mail, doing a drive by happy birthday, performing a video concert).
- **Encourage connection:** Teenagers thrive on their connection with others. Supporting that connection creatively is encouraged. Remember that they spend most of their time at school with their peers, so increasing limits on social connection through media, phone, or other devices may be appropriate at this stage.
- **Addressing school:** Becoming the primary educator for a teenager can be complicated. Not only does it mean that you are in an evaluative role for your teen, but it also means you may be helping them with material that you have not learned or do not remember! Remember that this is crisis schooling, not home schooling. Rely on existing resources instead of reinventing the wheel. If it becomes a battle, ask your teen to set 1-2 goals that they can work on (created with your teen and by your teen) to accomplish by the end of the week or by the end of this period. Remind yourself that there may be additional guidance coming soon from the districts as well.
- **Set a good example:** If you are going to encourage your teens to socially distance themselves, you can set an example with your own actions. Demonstrate appropriate boundaries with others and model how you can connect despite our in person limitations.
- **Connect them with support:** If you see your teen struggling and don't think they are getting the support they need from friends or family, connect them with therapy resources or chat lines. The Crisis Text Line (741741) offers 24/7 support.
- **Use your own support:** This is HARD. Connect with others who have teenagers going through this experience. Remember that taking care of your family also means taking care of yourself.



Rhythm and Routine

Have a rhythm and routine Monday through Friday

- Keep sleep schedule generally consistent
- Have some set activities you do every day
- Use a sticky note or piece of paper to set their “schedule” for the day, either the night before or in the morning while they eat breakfast
- Having rhythm and routine does many things: helps you feel productive, gives you a sense of grounding, helps plan your day rather than deciding moment by moment.

Every day you can take a **SSECC** to be intentional about your day:

- **Screen free leisure** (work on a puzzle, crochet, play a board game, draw a picture or do a coloring page, do a craft, play fetch with your dog or pet your cat, bake cookies, paint your nails). Consider writing a list to look to for ideas when you feel bored.
- **Social connections** (video chat someone but do a paired activity such as eating lunch together or even baking cookies “together” in your own respective kitchens, call someone, text someone, if your parents permit go for a bike ride with a friend, talk to your neighbors in your front yards)
- **Exercise** (go for a walk, do a youtube exercise video, play Just Dance video game)
- **Cognitive stimulation** (read a book, listen to a podcast, research a topic that is interesting to you, learn to do something new through a youtube educational video like playing the guitar)
- **Chores or tasks** (continue to tidy up your living spaces, do your laundry, do the dishes)

Time boxing is also very helpful in times like this. Use your Alexa, Google home, or phone to set timers for focused time on these activities.

An example of a routine:

- ☐ Wake up
- ☐ Eat breakfast
- ☐ Set intentions for the day
- ☐ Get dressed
- ☐ Go for a walk
- ☐ Read for an hour
- ☐ Bake a batch of cookies
- ☐ Call a friend
- ☐ Make/eat lunch
- ☐ Research a topic of interest or work on a new skill
- ☐ Do a load of laundry and tidy your bedroom
- ☐ Work on a puzzle
- ☐ Eat dinner with family
- ☐ Watch TV
- ☐ Usual bedtime routine
- ☐ Go to bed

