

Helping Teenagers Cope During Corona Times: Struggles and Challenges

High school students are dealing with quite a few challenges these days. They're required to get through finals while being extremely stressed for time and with irregular study conditions. Some of them need to stay at home or are even in isolation, which can cause a number of emotional difficulties in an already stressful time. How can we provide them with the support they need and help them to cope successfully?



Worries throughout adolescence

Adolescence is a time filled with emotional, physical and social changes. Many teenagers feel stressed and worried in light of the many challenges they face during these years. Their social status, arguments with their peers, disagreements within the family, body image, difficulties with school material and fears regarding their future, are only part of the worries they are dealing with. Many adolescents are even expected to make important decisions that can affect the rest of their lives.

Into this already emotionally and mentally overwhelming time, the corona period brings many more challenges. Uncertainty and constant change in the daily routine are added on to the accumulated gaps in school material and the need to prepare for finals in a short time. Naturally, health worries also arise during this time and can increase the stress teens feel. This is added to community and social activities being reduced, activities that are essential to the sense of belonging and are a central source of support in their lives.

Supportive parenting for teenagers

The ability to recover from difficult times depends on psychological resilience and your child's sense of ability. A strong and positive relationship with you and with other adults will help them develop personal skills that will allow them to adapt to changes and deal with the obstacles and challenges they face. Make sure to keep in touch with your child, encourage them to talk to you, and actively listen to their feelings. It's important to treat their fears and problems appropriately, and to help them feel that it's normal to feel this way. Remind your child that it's natural to feel stressed and worried, and that it might take time to adjust to the changes. Try sending them positive messages, while hugging them or providing other affectionate contact, and show that you believe in their ability to cope. Show personal example; talk about your feelings and show your child what you're doing to successfully cope with the worries and stress.

Finals - off schedule

One of the main issues during these times is taking finals in irregular conditions, while being stressed for time, and in some cases even through remote studying or while being in isolation. It's important to understand that many teenagers feel that high school studies and finals will set the course for their entire future, so they might experience a lot of stress regarding the option of their finals being negatively affected by the corona crisis. Other teenagers might have a difficult time bringing themselves to study because of the many changes in their routine and the gaps that have been created. Even with all the worries, there are several ways for you to help your child get through finals season.

Parental involvement in studies

Teenagers also need your support and encouragement to study, but in a different way than they needed it in the past. Your child will probably need to feel more independent in their studies. So that your child will know that you're available to them when they need you, show interest in their studies, but it's best not to push too hard. Challenges are a natural part of life, and your child needs to learn how to deal with them on their own. Let them try to deal with their problems on their own before getting involved; failures are also an important part of the process. Still, try to stay aware of their situation; when you see your child struggling to perform a task, show interest and ask how their coping. Support them also when they don't succeed, avoid being judgmental about their behavior and encourage them to keep trying.

You can and should establish habits that will support your child's studies. Help them create a homework routine at a set time and place, where you will make sure to create an environment free of distractions like TV or younger siblings. Routinely speak with your child about their learning experience during meal times. Put emphasis on their learning experience and not their accomplishments. Share their feelings and take part in their happiness and excitement when they're successful, and offer support and love when they show frustration or are having a difficult time.

Achievable goals

To reinforce your child's sense of self-efficiency, it's important to help them set goals that are achievable. Accept the fact that they're good in certain fields and not as good in others, and help them think about their strengths and limitations. Offer them to try studying in different ways, so that you'll be able to understand together how they study optimally. Help them plan and organize their studying according to the understandings you've reached. If, for example, they need frequent breaks, encourage them to plan a number of short study sessions throughout the day. If they learn better through activity and experience, encourage them to create presentations that they'll be able to share with their friends. When they're having a hard time, emphasize the way they're studying and not their accomplishments, and encourage them to develop planning and self-discipline skills. At the same time, help them focus on the things they're good at, to help them build their self-confidence.

Sleep

Quality sleep is especially important to improve energy levels, memory and concentration and to stay in a good mood. In times with many changes to their routine and the burden of studying for finals, your child's sleep might be the first thing to be negatively affected. Throughout adolescence, teenagers need nine hours of sleep to function properly. The quality of their sleep can also be negatively affected if your child is sleeping in an environment full of light and sound stimulants - with a television on or a phone in their hand.

To help your child develop healthy sleep patterns, encourage them to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. It's best to avoid long naps in the afternoon, which can negatively affect their sleep at night. Ask them to turn off electronic equipment about an hour before going to sleep, and talk to them about the importance of sleep hygiene. If your child is having a hard time sleeping, try teaching them relaxation methods, and talk with them about their worries throughout the day. Compliment them if you see they're trying to change their sleep patterns. If you're worried that the problem is getting worse, speak with your child about your fears and ask for professional help from the family doctor or school counselor.

Teens in isolation

If your child is put into isolation, they, and you, are required to put up with another challenge. The isolation period can cause health worries and anxieties that teenagers might have a hard time dealing with. In many cases the entire school is shut down, and sometimes even remote learning isn't happening. In this situation, the entire daily routine is undermined; your child isn't studying, can't meet their friends, and there isn't even a chance to go out to get some fresh air. When required to spend hours alone with no activities, the most available solution is the screen.

Even though it's usually highly recommended to limit your child's screen time, going into isolation requires us to readjust the limitations. The internet and phone during isolation are a gateway to social life, which is now only taking place on social media and WhatsApp. This is not the time to pile up harsh demands about screen time, completing tasks or school requirements. Still, it's important and preferable to encourage your kids to think how they'd like to spend their time and encourage them to build a balanced daily routine, that includes a healthy diet, physical activity and maintaining sleeping hours. Talk to them about the negative effects of extended screen use, and help them notice the changes in their levels of energy and their mood when they're without physical activity for so long. Compliment them when they set their own goals, try new activities, or work hard to maintain a healthy routine. Encourage them to figure out what calming activities they can include in their daily routine - a bath, reading a book, listening to music. Talk to them about their worries so that they feel safe, and help them think positive thoughts that will help them deal with the stress.

When should I ask for help?

Emotional ups and downs are a natural reaction in times characterized by a lot of stress and changes. But if your child's levels of stress keep rising, their fears get worse or the stress is having a negative effect on their sleep, appetite and levels of energy or enjoyment, or if they're having a hard time returning to routine life after isolation, you should speak to your pediatrician or family doctor to get professional help.