

Tips for Parents to Help their High School Seniors Through COVID-19 Pandemic

During these difficult times, it is only natural for teens to feel the loss of many of their connections, missing their routine, teachers and peers, and the loss of the senior year experience, major recognition events, competitions and memories.

Below is some advice for parents and seniors who are finding their plans for senior year totally turned upside down..

Validate your Child's Experience

This is a sudden change, and a loss—of community, graduation ceremonies, living environments, sporting events, etc. Allow your teens to grieve and listen to their feelings without judgment. Help your teens practice gratitude and to continue to focus on their goals of being engaged in online classes and developing routine and structure in their day to day life.

- During this time, teens can practice gratitude and self-compassion for what they're going through.
- Families can acknowledge and validate their feelings and keep the lines of communication open about what's challenging and difficult about this change. Show empathy and compassion for one another.
- Encourage your child to keep a daily journal and document any feelings they are experiencing including feelings of gratitude.
- List for your child all the things in their life that is going well. Focusing on positivity will create a happier outlook and decrease feelings of fear.
- Practice as a family mindfulness and meditation on a daily basis.

Maintain Structure as Much as Possible

- In addition to switching from in-person classes to online learning, students are experiencing uneasiness about this change. Because of this, it's important to develop a family schedule and structure to provide stability.
- During this time of limitations for teens of where they can go and what they are allowed to do, it is imperative that they maintain a daily routine that includes, scheduled class time, relaxation and sleep, hygiene, nutrition, exercise, online screen time with friends and other self-care activities.

Stay Connected with Others

Teens can feel isolated from others. Social media and texting is a great way to feel connected but it's also important to engage in more interpersonal communication such as calling someone on the phone, video chat, or watching shows with others remotely. Become creative to maintain those important social connections.

Find Purpose in Daily Activities

This is an important time for kids to feel empowered, to find a purpose and to make a difference to help others, at home and on their social media community.

- Make a list of chores for your child to complete every day.
- Help your child create an online page that promotes their interests and strengths to help others in their community. Example, share positive experiences and inspiring quotes with others, use your talents or skills online to teach other teens. Example may be tutoring, or teaching online dance.
- Develop a weekly calendar that includes making bed, shower, and getting ready for the day, doing schoolwork, etc. to set them up for success.
- Setting goals or intention for the day is a great way for teens to feel a sense of accomplishment. Intentions can be simple or complex. For example, "making my bed every morning" or "running in my neighborhood for 2 miles" or "finish reading my favorite book today." This gives kids purpose and excitement after completing daily goals and creates happiness.

Limit Exposure to the News

- Everyone feels it's important to stay informed, but allow yourself to take a pause from the stressful news. Take a break to watch a movie, read, exercise, help the family with chores, chat with friends and other self-care activities. This will help kids become more resilient and develop healthy coping skills.

College and your future

- For many students, this is a critical time to make final decisions regarding college by May 1. Visits to colleges and other admitted student events have all been cancelled. Although this is difficult but the good news is that many colleges already have virtual tours online. This is

a time to view the campuses virtually with your family and share the excitement regarding your decision. In fact, you can even connect with your future classmates and students might even get to know their classmates better through social media than if they were actually on campus.

- Remember, we are all in this together. Although you may be going through this experience more with your family than friends, it is an opportunity to create some great memories. Also, because you will be heading off to college, take advantage of this time to strengthen the bond with your family.

Source: <https://www.chicagoparent.com/learn/general-parenting/high-school-seniors-covid19/>

Monitoring Mood and Mental Well-Being

It's important for teens to feel comfortable to communicate to their parents when they feel uneasy or fearful. If you notice your teen is experiencing anxiety or depression beyond your scope of assistance, please explore online therapy services or utilize the hotline number listed below. There are many therapists offering online counseling services and access to services can be obtained at www.psychologytoday.com or contact your medical insurance plan for covered therapy services.

- Allow your child to express their feelings. It is a real loss and allow them to grieve and acknowledge their feelings.
- As a result of social distancing from their friends and being home 24 hours a day, your child will need their space to be alone in their room to think or be online with friends.
- Also, believe in their ability to create new memories with their family, friends and experiences.
- As parents, remember children will model the same behavior based on your reaction to current events. If you are honest regarding your fears but display a positive outlook and take control over your daily life, then your children will follow with a similar mindset.
- Help your child plan and look forward to their virtual graduation ceremony and prom. Think about what you are going to wear, the friends you will invite and graduation day. Allow your child to dream and plan towards their future. This will take their mind off of current events and give them something to look forward to. Kids are very creative and with your help, they can look forward to their graduation events and find closure at the end of this journey.
- Parents should create their own schedule and provide a consistent routine for their kids to help create a positive home environment.

Warning signs

Remember, it is normal for your teen to experience feelings of anger, sadness, worry and fear. As a community, we are all experiencing these worldwide events together, it's important to stay strong, build each other up and support our children. Help your children become strong and resilient by using this time to explore new interests, develop new skills, connect with family and find joy in the simple things in life. Your teen has had limited life experiences so they will need a lot more patience, understanding and love during from you.

Pay close attention to these warning signs in your teen: destructive behavior, including self-harm, extreme anger, hoarding, mood fluctuations, isolating themselves too much in their room, anxiety, withdrawal from family, lack of interest in online school work or chatting with friends and are unable to function in their daily routine.

Emergency Contact Numbers are listed below for consultation

24 hour Crisis line: 602-222-9444
EMPACT (Mobile Crisis Team): 1-866-205-5229
Teen Lifeline (24 Hour Hotline): 602-248-8336
Trevor's Project (LGBT Hotline): 1-866-488-7386
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
Community Information and Referral: 1-877-211-8661

Links for additional resources:

Quaranteneers: Strategies for Parenting in Close Quarters

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/well/family/coronavirus-covid-teenagers-teens-parents-kids-family-advice.html>

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>

The Kids May Not Be Alright. And That's OK

<https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2020/03/31/the-class-of-2020-graduation-prom-covid-19-ellen-odonnell>

Every Day Strong: How to help your child's mental health during COVID-19

https://www.heraldextra.com/news/community/charities/everyday-strong-how-to-help-your-child-s-mental-health/article_e4c52dd3-28f3-52d5-a547-d1890050bbf2.html

How Mindfulness Can Help During COVID-19

<https://childmind.org/article/how-mindfulness-can-help-during-covid-19/>