

Some Tips for Families on How to Help their Teens During this Time

The past few weeks have been difficult for families for a wide variety of reasons. The structures and routines your family was familiar with have changed. It has been difficult for your teen to be safe at home when they really want to be active, with their friends. We know that your family has kept adjusting to all the changes – cancelling plans for Spring Break, figuring out how to be safe and care for those you care about, and what to do when school hasn't reopened.

Many teens have been feeling anxious, alone, disappointed and sad. Unicef posted the following suggestions on their website from adolescent psychologist, Dr. Lisa Damour on how teens can practice self-care and take care of their mental health ([link to article](#)):

1. Recognize that your anxiety is completely normal

If school closures and alarming headlines are making you feel anxious, you are not the only one. In fact, that's how you're supposed to feel. "Psychologists have long recognized that anxiety is a normal and healthy function that alerts us to threats and helps us take measures to protect ourselves," says Dr. Damour. "Your anxiety is going to help you make the decisions that you need to be making right now — not spending time with other people or in large groups, washing your hands and not touching your face." Those feelings are helping to keep not only you safe, but others too. This is "also how we take care of members of our community. We think about the people around us, too."

2. Create distractions

"What psychologists know is that when we are under chronically difficult conditions, it's very helpful to divide the problem into two categories: things I can do something about, and then things I can do nothing about," says Dr. Damour.

There is a lot that falls under that second category right now, and that's okay, but one thing that helps us to deal with that is creating distractions for ourselves. Many have found it helpful to develop new routines and to use this opportunity to develop new patterns for exercise, mindful practices, finding ways to safely practice kindness and compassion to others you care about.

3. Find new ways to connect with your friends; be kind to yourself and others.

Get creative. Join in a Tik-Tok challenge. Have a 'chat group' that meets to check-in once every few days. Start a gratitude journal. Look around your neighbourhood and see who needs help or encouragement – particularly consider the families who have someone who is 'working on the front line' or who have lost income.

4. Feel your feelings

There have been a lot of losses and disappointments over the last few weeks. Dr. Damour says: "When it comes to having a painful feeling, the only way out is through. Go ahead and be sad, and if you can let yourself be sad, you'll start to feel better faster."

Processing feelings looks different for everyone. "Some kids are going to make art, some kids are going to want to talk to their friends and use their shared sadness as a way to feel connected in a time when they can't be together in person, and some kids are going to want to find ways to get food to food banks," says Dr. Damour. Some students will talk with adults in their lives; others will not. What's important is that you do what feels right to you.