

COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION:

# Support for Parents and Teens

Your children's world has changed dramatically in the course of just a few weeks. They're home from school, missing their friends and activities, worried about the news—and unsure of when things will return to normal.

As a parent, you may feel overwhelmed and uncertain about what to do. Use this guide as a starting point for supporting your kids both emotionally and academically during the coronavirus pandemic.

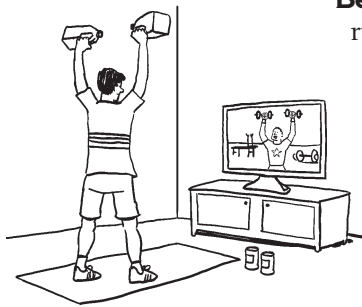


**Editor's note:** Guidelines are changing rapidly. Make sure to follow all local, state, and federal laws and recommendations on social distancing and other practices when using these ideas.

## Maintain a sense of normalcy

Adjusting to the “new normal” will be easier if you and your tween or teen plan ahead. Consider this advice.

**Stick to routines.** Have your child go to bed and wake up at his usual time. Encourage him to get dressed in regular clothes—lounging in pajamas all day will make him feel more removed from “real life.” Also, set regular family meal-times rather than letting everyone snack all day.



**Be physically active.** Go for runs or bike rides, and play backyard games. Try online fitness classes, perhaps barre, bootcamp, or tai chi from the Y ([ymca360.org](http://ymca360.org)). Many gyms now offer free workout videos for members and non-members alike. And celebrity trainers and fitness instructors are

live-streaming workouts on social media.

**Turn events into virtual ones.** Teens may feel a sense of grief over canceled milestones like prom and graduation ceremonies. While online events certainly won't be the same, they may provide some comfort. Encourage your teenager to dress up and hold a virtual dance party with friends. If she receives her diploma in the mail, decorate your home, cook a special meal, and hold a video call where she can walk across the “stage” as family and friends clap.

**Pursue interests.** Familiar activities contribute to the feeling that life goes on. Encourage your sports fan to watch classic sports on TV and do soccer drills in the yard. A budding artist can look online for drawing tutorials—and have plenty of time to sketch. If your tween or teen takes music lessons, see if the teacher can continue lessons online.



## Stay at home!

Does your child complain about being quarantined? Kids may believe they won't get sick, or that if they do, it won't be a big deal. Or might think it's okay to gather in parking lots or play basketball. Here's how to handle this mindset:

- Make sure your tween or teen realizes she can spread coronavirus even if she isn't showing any symptoms. Explain that everyone has a responsibility to protect others, especially those who are more vulnerable. That includes older people (suggest that she think about her own grandparents!) and those with chronic health conditions.
- If your child begs to go out with friends, ask how he would feel if he brought the virus home and your whole family got sick. Tell him that's what could happen if he was around a classmate who had coronavirus and didn't know it yet.

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## Middle Years • High School Years

## Manage stress

Your tween or teen likely feels anxious about the pandemic, but she may express her feelings or cope differently than you do. Be on the lookout for signs of stress. For instance, kids are known for using humor to relieve stress, perhaps by cracking jokes or sharing memes about the crisis. Then, try these strategies to help your child stay calm.

### Reassure your teenager

Having some control over a situation reduces anxiety. Talk to her about what your family is doing to be as safe as possible—and to help others stay safe. Examples include washing hands, staying at home, and social distancing (remaining at least six feet away from people who don't live with you).



### Enjoy the great outdoors

Spending time in nature is a great stress reliever. Take family walks or hikes. Try stargazing or bird-watching, and download a free app to help you identify constellations or bird species. Plant a garden. Have picnic breakfasts, lunches, or dinners in your yard or on your balcony.

### Limit media consumption

It's important to stay informed, but news coverage can contribute to anxiety. Keep the TV off, and set certain times each day to check for updates. Suggest that your tween or teen turn off phone notifications so he's not constantly bombarded with unsettling headlines or tweets.

### Help others

Give your teenager a sense of purpose. She might make cards for health-care workers or organize a drive with friends to sew face masks. Another idea is to set up a neighborhood Google Doc to coordinate the exchange of items people need. Neighbors could consult the document and sign up to leave toilet paper, soap, sugar, flour, and other scarce products at each other's front doors.

## Doing schoolwork at home

Distance learning is new to students and parents alike. Try these tips for a successful experience.

### Get organized

Your tween or teen may need to attend remote classes or communicate with teachers or classmates using audio or video. He should try to set up in an area without background noise—and where he won't disturb you if you're working, too. Perhaps he'll use a corner of his bedroom or the dining room table. Also, have him set an alarm to log in on time—a few minutes early is ideal in case there's a glitch. And it's a good idea to close browser windows and tabs and put away devices he's not using for school.



### Designate "office hours"

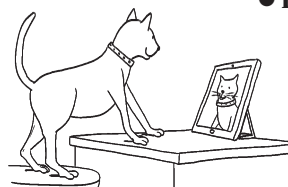
Suggest that your child write a schedule that includes required class times and independent work time. Point out that she should schedule regular breaks for lunch, snacks, and physical activity. Try to time things so you can eat lunch together and catch up.

### Promote academic honesty

Have your teen continue to follow the school's academic honesty policy. Explain that it applies at home as well as in school. So if he's asked to complete a distance-learning packet independently, for instance, he shouldn't share answers with friends. Or if he takes a test online, he's not allowed to Google the answers (unless the teacher states otherwise).

## Reach out

Combat social isolation while social distancing. Try these suggestions for spending time with friends and family via Skype, FaceTime, or other video-chat platforms.



● **Hang out with friends.** Suggest that your teenager hold regular get-togethers with friends.

They might plan a special virtual activity like a hobby party. They can chat and share their projects as each

person makes jewelry, knits, or paints. Or they could do a series of "cooking shows." Each time, one friend teaches the others to make a favorite dish.

● **Spend time with relatives.** Invite grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins to family game night. It's fun—and it helps to reduce loneliness, especially if someone lives alone. Play trivia, Pictionary, charades, or any favorite family game.

## Middle Years • High School Years