

COPING WITH COVID-19

Helping Teens Cope

Margaret Machara, Ph.D., CFLE, Professor, TSU Department of Human Sciences
Contact: 615-963-5628, mmachara@tnstate.edu

Beatrice Harris, Ph.D., Associate Professor & TSU Extension Specialist
Rita Fleming, M.S., Assistant Professor & TSU Extension Specialist
Kane Reeves, Ed.D., Extension Agent & County Director, TSU Cooperative Extension
Katie Conrad, Ph.D., UTK Extension Specialist (Human Development)
Lynn Brookins, Ed.D., Region Program Leader



“Teenagers are the most misunderstood people on the planet. They are treated like children and expected to act like adults.”

— Unknown

Having a daily battle with your teen? You are not alone. Many teens are rejecting the restrictions and precautions that the pandemic has brought. They are tired of staying home and want to spend time with their friends. They also may especially be feeling the loss of important milestones in their life; like graduations, spring breaks, proms, and back to school events.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT

Teens are at a special time in their life where they are trying to separate from their parents and move toward adulthood¹. They want to make decisions for themselves. They also feel invincible, like nothing can harm them. Our brains aren't fully developed until the age of 25. So, teens have a hard time seeing the big picture of decisions and the consequences of their actions. Since COVID-19 doesn't have a big impact on most younger people, it can be hard for teens to take the disease seriously.



VIRTUAL CONNECTION

Social engagement is important during the teenage years. Peers become more important and teens separate some from their families. They have to decide what practices and beliefs belong to them versus what their parents force on them. Allow your teen to connect with friends and peers virtually. This could be video chats with friends, connection on social media, or gaming with peers. Make sure you have talked about any family rules; but as long as your teen has shown a sense of responsibility, give them the privacy and freedom to maintain those social connections. If they break family rules or act in an inappropriate way, monitor them more closely; but give them a chance to earn back trust.



TAKE IT OUTSIDE

After long periods of restrictions, your teen may need more than virtual connections. They may need to spend closer time with friends. The CDC

has reported lower risk to activities that take place outside with appropriate social distancing². So, let your teens interact with their friends outdoors. They can take a walk or have a picnic. They can also sit outside and chat. If you have the equipment, set up a projector outside and have a movie night. Let your child’s friends bring their own supplies and they can all camp out in the backyard. If you explain your expectations for distance and masks, your teen may be very creative in ideas for spending time with their friends.

RESPONSIBILITY

Children in general need to be trusted with more responsibility as they get older. This helps them develop the skills they’ll need as they take care of themselves. Since teens are nearing adulthood, they

FINAL THOUGHTS

Despite the pandemic, this is a time to grow independence in your teens. Let them make the decisions you are comfortable with them making. Set clear and well thoughtout boundaries when necessary. Make sure you leave the door open to discuss their concerns and requests. Actually listen to them and explain your point of view. Look up facts to help inform the choices you make as a family. This will help them think through choices completely in the future.

REFERENCES

1. Berk, L. (2010) Development Through the Lifespan, 5th Edition. Columbus, OH: Allyn & Bacon. ISBN-10: 0-205-68793-8
2. CDC (2020). Considerations for Social Gatherings. CDC.gov August 4, 2020 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>
3. Mayo Clinic (2020). Teen Depression. Mayoclinic.org August 4, 2020 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/teen-depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20350985>

hopefully can be a big help during the pandemic. Giving teens specific jobs shows trust and builds skills. It can also give them a sense of pride and purpose rather than focusing on the frustration of having their life disrupted. Ask for their input on what they’d like to take charge of or what project they’d like to lead. Remember, the responsibility that you give teens should match the priviledges that they have. If they prove they can be counted on to help out, then they should be counted on to make good choices at other times.

KEEP AN EYE OUT

The teenage years can be turbulent years. The added stresses and disruption of the pandemic can add extra pressure. Keep an eye out for emotional (hopeless or worthless feelings) or behavioral (sleep changes, less attention to hygiene, isolation) signs of mental health distress³. Talk to your teen and contact a mental health professional if necessary. Call the hotline listed below if you need help.



For General Health Information: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
 TN COVID-19 Information: <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov.html>
 TN Mental Health Hotline: 1-855-274-7471
 TN Addiction and Recovery Hotline: 1-800-889-9789

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