

Tips for Parents in Supporting Teens through losses of anticipated events during COVID 19

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This is a time of year when many older teenagers are preparing for the next step of their lives: Adulthood. With graduation parties and ceremonies postponed, proms cancelled, work hours cut, and severe limits placed on their mobility -just as they are becoming independent young adults, many teens are awash in negative feelings about the COVID 19 crisis and how it has changed their world.

As parents, you may be feeling some of these same things. Here are some tips to consider for helping your Teen through COVID 19 changes.

- **Acknowledge the negative feelings.** This is disappointing, frustrating, annoying, scary, and confusing, just to name a few. Help your Teen identify their feelings about this situation. Share your own. How many feelings do you share on this?
 - The COVID 19 crisis has created loss, grief is expected. Help your Teen list what is lost/different for them because of this world-wide health crisis.
 - Make room for difficult feelings, they are normal reactions to a difficult time.
 - Who else in the family or in our community is feeling similarly?
 - As with all grief reactions. There is an ebb-and-flow to dealing with these losses. Your Teen may cycle through this process several times daily! Help them to acknowledge and accept that these emotions will come and go. And that they will feel differently and better again.

- **Seeing this problem from a different point of view is an emerging skill for Teens.** They have not mastered it yet. Be gentle when helping them to put their experience into perspective. The situation could be worse. For many people in many parts of the world, the country, and even this community, the situation is much worse.
 - Ask your Teen to use an importance scale from 1-10 (10 being most important) to help them become more aware of the significance of their experience. “On a scale of one to ten, how significant is it that you can’t or won’t have the _____ experience. Using this same scale how would you compare this to the significance of all your family members or loved ones staying healthy? Being able to go back to work? Being able to feed the family and pay bills? Having a safe community to live in?”

- **Practice gratitude.** As a parent, you can model each day what you are grateful for. You can also ask your Teen what they are grateful for in that moment.

- **Focus on the greater good.** It may help to watch and listen for stories of others who have made great sacrifice to help others during this hard time. These are easy to find in news stories and even in the neighborhood you live in. A gentle reminder that, “*We are in this together and practicing social distancing prevents loss of life*” might help.

- **Action steps: What can you control?** It is easy to fall into the trap of focusing on things we cannot control. Help your Teen focus on what they can control. How they respond to the situation. How they eat, sleep, use their time each day. How they treat others. How they choose to view the situation. How they can prepare for their future while they are waiting.
 - What skills will you need as an adult that you could work on now? Are there home or yard projects that could use some attention? Does your Teen have the necessary life skills such as cooking and doing laundry or making a budget that they can continue to build? Is it practical or feasible to take online courses for college credit if they are college-bound if not able to work right now?

- **Service to others:** What kind, caring, supportive deeds you can your teen do?
 - Consider getting involved with service work/volunteering: guide your Teen to helping a neighbor, family friend, or elderly relative. Investigate if there are needs in the community for volunteers who can help others through shopping or delivering food or other supplies or helping with yard work, online platforms, or delivering groceries.

- **Allow Teens to use their digital platforms to connect socially.** No group of humans is as skilled at use of technology as our young people. It is okay to encourage your emerging adults to connect with their friend group socially, and still maintain parent expectations and basic rules around screen time use. As a family, you may choose to postpone that high school graduation party, but also consider a digital social-graduation celebration.

- **Get out in nature.** Social distancing does not mean sitting in a bedroom. With warming Spring weather, encourage your Teen and the family to get outside. Going for a walk, hike or bike ride, planting a garden are just a few ways to experience the outdoors.

- **Change your language about your day.** Instead of “this day is boring and the same as yesterday” to “What is going to be good about today?”

- **Set goals.** Consider learning a new skill. Some young adults are using this opportunity to try out a new hobby, read a new book, or learn about a new topic they wondered about. The internet could be a great starting point to developing knowledge and understanding about careers, social, historical, or political issues, or learning more about life!

- **Connect with your siblings/other family members.** Friend groups are not the only people that need connection. Families around the world are rediscovering games, activities, and common interests with each other. If being with family in-person is not

possible, Teens can use their technology skills to reach out to relatives. Imagine teaching aging relatives to Skype?

- **Have meaningful conversations.** There is no time like the present for family members to learn more about each other's hopes, dreams, goals, and values. Sometimes it is hard to push past the "how was your day" exchange. Consider starting a routine of family members drawing one question that helps identify what is important to them in a creative way. One person draws the question and then each participating family member can answer it. The internet is filled with ideas for good questions that help teens (and other family members) talk about what really matters to them. There is no end of questions. Just Google it! Here is short list to get you started.
 - If you could pick anywhere in the world to live, where would you live? Why? Who would you want to live with or near you?
 - What scares you the most about the future of the world?
 - If you could design a dream job, what would it be?
 - If you could design a dream house, how would it look?
 - If you could travel back in time, what time would you go to and why?
 - If you could interview anyone in the world, who would you want to talk to? What would you ask them?
 - Do you believe money can buy happiness? Why or why not?
 - If you could have one super-power, what would it be?
 - What do you think are three of the most important qualities to have in order to live a great life?
 - How would you define love without using the word "love"?
- Use technology supports.
 - There are many apps that have been created and geared towards stress or anxiety management/coping. Consider exploring one that might be right for you.

Conclusion

Parenting your Teens as they near adulthood requires a delicate balance. On the one hand you need to validate the frustration they feel over the changes in their lives that now one can control. On the other hand, you want to help them to move forward with their lives. Be present for your Teen. Listen to them. Gently challenge them to see options for themselves to grow. COVID 19 cannot define our lives. Resilience is the ability overcome and bounce back from setbacks. Help your Teens bounce back!