

Teens and COVID: Challenges and Opportunities Part 2

Assembled by SSIO-USA Mental Health Professionals for SSIO members

Teens are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in some unique ways which can be quite an adjustment for them and their loved ones. In part 1, we suggested some parenting strategies to help support teens emotionally and in other ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue on in Part 2 with communication, family, media use, community involvement, and psychological strategies to assist teens to cope during this trying and often stressful time.

Communicate honestly & openly

- **Share information about what is happening** in a calm and factual way to help ease their concerns about the virus. Discuss facts about COVID-19 and correct misinformation when you hear it. Reinforce the basics, like the importance of wearing a facemask in public, frequent hand washing and avoiding touching their face.
- **Stress that staying home saves lives.** Talk about how social distancing is an important way *they* are helping slow the spread of the virus and protecting those most at risk. Have a strict “no cheating” rule and stress that it is NOT okay to hang out with friends in person or play outdoor sports like basketball and softball.

Stay safely connected

- **Reach out virtually.** Allow your teen to stay connected to friends and loved ones during social distancing by phone, text, video chat, or social media. (Remind them to check their privacy settings so they are not posting too much personal information online.) Playing games online with friends can also be relaxing and enjoyable for your teen. But be sure to agree on screen time during school days.
- **Help others connect.** Many teens have expertise in using technology and can teach parents or grandparents how to video chat or use social media. This is also an opportunity for them to bring you into their virtual world.

What about media use?

- While limits are still important, it's understandable that under these unusual circumstances, your teen's screen time will likely increase. Work together to come up with a plan that includes both online and offline time. Allowing your teen to be a part of making a media plan can help them stick to it.

Support family & community

- **New responsibilities.** Routines have changed, and your family may need extra help in caring for younger children or keeping the house clean. Talk to your teen about ways they can play a bigger role. For example, can they help plan or cook dinner? How about teaching their siblings a new dance or fun game?

- **Declutter and donate.** Encourage them to clean out their room, the basement, or declutter the garage and prepare items to donate to charity.
- **Volunteer within the community.** Following social distancing and local regulations, suggest your teen look online for local opportunities to serve. Show acts of kindness by making someone's day better with a phone call, text, or social media post. Volunteer to help tutor children of neighbors or friends online.

Mind and body health

Help your teen find ways to keep their mind and body healthy, such as:

- Go for a walk or a run outside, either by themselves or as a family.
- Read a book or visit the library online where there are thousands of e-books, audiobooks, and musical recordings. Research new hobbies or skills to learn.
- Do video workouts. Many can be found online, and some park districts are offering access to virtual exercise classes, too.
- Sing devotional songs as a family- Sai has said devotional singing is a cure for anxiety.
- Teens can develop their prayer and meditation.
- Create a video blog of life during the COVID-19 outbreak.

More psychological strategies for teens

Reframe- the way they're thinking about their issues

- For example: 'I'm stuck at home' to 'I'm safe at home.'
- Whatever experience they're having, it is possible to reframe it positively.

Reclaim autonomy

- Create schedules that work for them.
- Give them more opportunities to reclaim more autonomy (all ages- e.g. 'what do you want for dinner', 'do you want to go outside, go for a bike ride?').

Remain positive- be as positive as possible, put things into perspective.

- Remind them- this will not last forever.
- Reinforce that line of thinking.
- Level of resilience for adolescents and Y.A.'s is incredible.

Let's all remember that Sathya Sai will guide us all through the pandemic as needed, if we surrender to Him and stay attuned to His inner guidance.

Seventy percent of the world's population consists of 'youth,' who are the potential leaders of tomorrow. Unless they are properly trained to take up their role in the future society, the nation and the world will not progress in peace. ~ Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 1 Ch. 25, 1985

References

- American Academy of Pediatrics <https://www.healthychildren.org/>
- Center for Disease Control <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-lifecoping/managingstress-anxiety.html>
- Webinar: Parents, Kids and Mental Health During the COVID-19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TL7Jr5LPjNE&feature=youtu.be>