



Civitas News Hour – How COVID-19 Pandemic Affects Teens’ Mental Health & What to Do About It

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Pandemic’s Impact on Teens

- Devastating for adults, but its impact on teenagers is arguably far greater
- Teens naturally have a stronger drive to be social than adults
- Mourning the losses of prom, school groups, sports, and graduation
- Students aged 13 to 25 were polled about their current mood, and the top three results were **“frustrated” (54 percent), “nervous” (49 percent), and “disconnected” (40 percent).**
- Of those who shared they are nervous, **48% are concerned about the safety, health and well-being of their loved ones, 47% are worried about what is going to happen in regards to things they are/were currently involved in (esp. school in progress) and plans they have for the future (esp. next steps in school), 40%: Getting the virus and getting very sick or even dying. 23%: People being a carrier / spreading the virus to others.**
- **Feelings not being validated:** “At least you’re not being asked to go off to war. You’re just being told to stay at home, it could be much worse.” “If you’re so sad because you’re missing prom when there are people dying then you need to have your reality checked.” “Don’t worry, it will all be over soon.”
- **48% of teen feel disconnected** — The impact of social distancing is hitting young people especially hard. It’s also contributing to the spike in feeling sad: 42% specifically call out being physically disconnected from their friends and family for why they are feeling this way.
- Despite all of the tech at their fingertips, most acknowledge it’s a poor comparison to IRL interaction, and they are missing it. There is a pervasive **loneliness** people are experiencing even if they are able to connect virtually. **71% say elements of true connection are irreplaceable**, including face-to face interaction and physical touch. **14% mention experiences** like eating out at restaurants and getting fresh air, and **13% point to emotions** like love and joy.



Quotes from Teens:

- “I’m trying to deal with the fact that my high school career is over,” she says. “Losing track and field, prom, and graduation sucks. And there’s no way to cope with it because I’m just never going to get to do those things. It feels like the last four years of hard work have been for nothing.”
- “When you’re in school you only think about going home, and now that you’re home, going to school is all you want to do.”
- “I miss sitting down in a restaurant with my family, which we used to do every Friday night,” he says. “I just didn’t realize how much I’d miss ‘normal life.’”
- “I’m kind of freaked out about going to college after this. I’m an only child going from living with no one to living in a dorm.”
- “COVID-19 has definitely impacted my mental health more than I ever thought it would. I never realized how much seeing my friends/different faces everyday and socializing was really needed until now. It is really tough feeling useless because you have nothing to do. I am even tired of being on my own phone.”
- “A lot of my opportunities are being canceled. It is frustrating that I have worked so hard in high school and in my last semester, everything is going downhill. It is even affecting my college decision. My parents are worried if I move far, but I have worked so incredibly hard throughout the past 3 years of high school and now because of the virus, it seems like all my hard work was for nothing.”

How to Cope

1. Establish structure (write out a schedule, create routines for how and when you do your schoolwork, talk to friends, etc, create a special area for school and another for hanging out with friends online)
2. Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day
3. Get outside for at least 30 minutes each day.
4. Express your feelings (journal, talk to friends or family, get therapy, etc).
5. Let yourself feel however you feel. Do not invalidate your own feelings. There are no weird or wrong feelings.



6. Do mindfulness formally (meditation) and informally (pay attention to any activity using your five senses) for a few minutes every day. Use recordings included as references for a 3 and 10 minute guided meditation.
7. Help others (e.g. make masks for healthcare workers, write notes and send to strangers or loved ones in need of some support, listen to friends when they talk, etc).
8. Find purpose (e.g. help out at home by cooking or cleaning, organize your room, plant a garden, take care of a pet, etc).
9. Set priorities (especially if you're overwhelmed with trying to do too much)
10. Limit screen time (especially 1 hour before bedtime)
11. Limit exposure to news about COVID-19
12. Communicate a lot (reach out to friends and family more than you normally do)

When to Seek Help

1. You are feeling more stressed, sad, worried, or angry than you normally do for several days in a row
2. You are having more trouble than normal getting out of bed, getting your school work done, or other important tasks for several days in a row
3. You are feeling miserable and considering ending your life

Questions?

Email Laura at Lchackes@mindfulstl.com or call The Center for Mindfulness & CBT at 314-561-9757. You can also visit our website www.mindfulstl.com for information about our providers and the services we provide. All of our clinicians are providing telehealth over a HIPAA compliant website, and most take insurance or offer a sliding scale.