

Why some teens find it tough to social distance

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Parenting a teenager can be an emotional minefield in the best of times,

but the social distancing of the coronavirus pandemic could really strain young people's mental health.

Teens and [young adults](#) who are confined to home during the [coronavirus](#) pandemic face numerous disappointments, including not being able to hang out with friends, missing out on new life experiences and trying to manage their [time](#), a mental [health](#) expert says.

This age group may not understand the importance of social distancing. Parents can help teens and young adults appreciate the need to do so by directing them to reliable sources of information, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Ann Murphy, director of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center and an associate professor at Rutgers School of Health Professions, in New Jersey.

"Take time to discuss things they can do to feel more connected to their peers through remote means. For younger teens, this may mean relaxing some of your restrictions on social media use. Explore new apps and tools that can facilitate group chats and video connection so they can stay connected to their peers," Murphy said in a Rutgers news release.

"While you don't want to encourage them to be on their electronic devices all the time, it is important to recognize the critical role of socialization and connection to peers," she explained.

Stress can become a problem when families are confined at home, so parents need to have compassion for themselves and other members of the household, Murphy advised.

"Make a plan for everyone to have some private time. Teen years are a time when [young people](#) distance themselves more from parental connections and move closer toward peer connections. This is a healthy

process that continues through young adulthood. Have a conversation with your child about how you can respect their privacy and alone time while still having them respect the needs of the family as a whole," Murphy said.

Start or maintain healthy habits and routines, such as good nutrition, regular exercise and adequate sleep.

Work with teens and young adults to establish a school routine at home, including when the school day will start, when they'll take breaks, and where they'll do their [school work](#). Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and create interim "due dates" so there's not a rush to complete assignments just before they're actually due.

If a teen or young adult is struggling emotionally with the situation, reassure them that it's normal to feel anxiety during this type of crisis.

"It is also normal for [teens](#) and young adults who are missing out on finishing their college semester, going to prom, participating in their school's theater production or sports competition, class trips and graduations to feel disappointed, sad, angry, frustrated. It is important not to minimize the impact of these losses," Murphy said.

You might also suggest mindfulness and meditation, deep breathing, physical exercise, keeping a gratitude journal and creating art.

If you're concerned about [mental health problems](#) such as anxiety, depression or [suicidal thoughts](#) in your children and think they need help, contact the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990 or text Talk With Us to 66746); SAMHSA's National Helpline (800-662-HELP); or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK).

More information: Harvard Medical School explains how to [talk to teens about the coronavirus crisis](#).

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