

# Ask the Pediatrician: How can I help my kids handle disappointment when things get canceled?

April 12 2021, by Sonia Ruparell, American Academy Of Pediatrics

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*My kids really love playing sports and are worried about more COVID-19 cancelations. How can I help them cope?*

The pandemic continues to affect children and teens. It has interrupted their normal school, social and athletic activities. Many kids are feeling more anxious, depressed and stressed. It is understandable that kids are disappointed if they can't play their favorite [sports](#) with their friends.

To help your children handle this disappointment, use it as an opportunity to teach them new coping skills. Here are several ideas:

1. Shift their focus: Help your kids focus on what they can control and worry less about what they can't. They don't have control over sports cancelations, but they can still keep in touch with their teammates, stay active, and choose to eat healthy foods.
2. Develop routines and schedules: Give your kids structure during the day. Having a [daily routine](#) to count on can help lower stress. Make sure they schedule fun activities to look forward to.
3. Get creative: Talk to the coach about the possibility of having virtual team meetings and training. The team can stay connected, and your kids won't feel as disappointed about not being able to play in person. Encourage focusing on goals in training instead of games. "Wins" for your child or teen could mean improving free-throw accuracy or increasing the speed of pitches.
4. Stay active: Regular exercise boosts mood, resilience and self-esteem. Exercise will also help keep your kids in shape for when they can get back to [team sports](#). If there's nowhere to go, try some online workouts. There are a lot of free apps and online videos that your pediatrician, sports medicine physician, or park district may be able to provide.

5. Try something new: For some children and teens, being an athlete is an important part of their identity. It is normal to feel a loss when sports stop, especially when it wasn't planned. Encourage your kids to discover new activities that help them relax and feel connected. They could start an art project, grow a windowsill garden, or even try a new sport. Running, biking outdoors or [rock climbing](#) are great individual sports for kids to try.

6. Give them choices: Allow your kids to make choices whenever possible. Let them decide and plan what to make for dinner, or choose the route for a daily family walk.

7. Prioritize sleep: Getting enough sleep is important for both physical and mental health. Make sure your grade-schoolers are getting 9 to 12 hours of sleep and your teens are getting 8 to 10. Have them put away screens an hour before bed.

8. Unplug and relax: For many kids, sports are an outlet that helps relieve stress. Loss of that outlet, combined with all the other stress created by the pandemic, can be overwhelming. Have your kids take just a few minutes each day to sit quietly, do breathing exercises, or gently stretch.

9. Keep talking: Check in with your kids regularly to talk about how they're doing. Be nonjudgmental. Offer support even when you don't have the answers. Help them develop some short-term goals.

10. Be aware of behavior changes: Feeling stressed, angry or sad is sometimes common, especially in times like these. More children and teens are finding it harder to cope during the pandemic, and cases of anxiety and depression are rising. Watch for changes like losing enjoyment in activities, becoming isolated and withdrawn and alterations in eating and sleeping patterns. If you feel you can't communicate with

your children or teens, or they are at risk of self-harm, contact your doctor right away.

Even as [youth sports](#) and other activities return, be sure to check in with your children often. The lingering effects of the pandemic will not disappear overnight. Talk with your pediatrician if you have any concerns about your child's mental health.

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