

# Psychology professor's tips for kids and teens with pandemic anger and anxiety

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Children and teens who are experiencing increased anxiety and anger during the coronavirus pandemic will need guidance and validation as their lives continue to change, said Robyn Mehlenbeck, director of

George Mason University's Center for Psychological Services and a clinical psychology professor in Mason's College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

"All kids are going to go through different struggles at different times. It's so important to validate their feelings," said Mehlenbeck. "We worry more about kids who always 'put on a happy face' as they are likely suppressing feelings. This can lead to more anger or anxiety."

Mehlenbeck said that parents and guardians should give children "permission to share that certain things are hard."

Mehlenbeck pointed out that teenagers are especially feeling the challenges of the pandemic.

"The preteens and teens are struggling big time," said Mehlenbeck. "All the things they want to do have been curtailed, including seeing their friends regularly, and that often leads to anger."

In addition, anyone under the age of 16 isn't currently eligible for COVID vaccination, while those 16 and older and many adults are. The availability of vaccines for adults while children and younger teens remain unvaccinated will likely cause further feelings of anger and frustration, said Mehlenbeck.

Mehlenbeck suggested helping redirect children's anger to activities that could make them feel better, such as doing things to help friends or other people and connecting socially with peers in a safe way.

In addition, data shows that focusing on gratitude can help address [anger](#). Writing down one thing each night that a child or [teen](#) is grateful for at least two weeks, can help improve mood, said Mehlenbeck.

"If a teenager finds a reason every night for gratitude, it can help their [feelings](#) become more manageable in time," said Mehlenbeck.

Mehlenbeck also said to expect that children and teens may experience increased anxiety as they face going back to school and getting involved in more group activities.

"Even kids who are very outgoing are out of practice for being social," said Mehlenbeck. "In addition, with everybody wearing masks, it can be confusing. You lose some of the visual cues that you normally have."

For children and teenagers working through anxiety, deep breathing exercises can help, said Mehlenbeck.

Mehlenbeck suggested getting children and teens accustomed to socializing again by finding ways to get together safely outside as the weather gets warmer. If a child or [teenager](#) is virtual now, but anxious about in-person school in the fall, let them visit the school, if possible, said Mehlenbeck. For [children](#) and teenagers going back to in-person now, talk to them honestly about how school is different than it used to be, said Mehlenbeck.

"You don't want to pretend that [school](#) is normal right now, because it's not," said Mehlenbeck. "You don't want to raise their expectations and have them be disappointed. You can say it's different, but at least you can see some of your friends or your teachers."

Provided by George Mason University

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