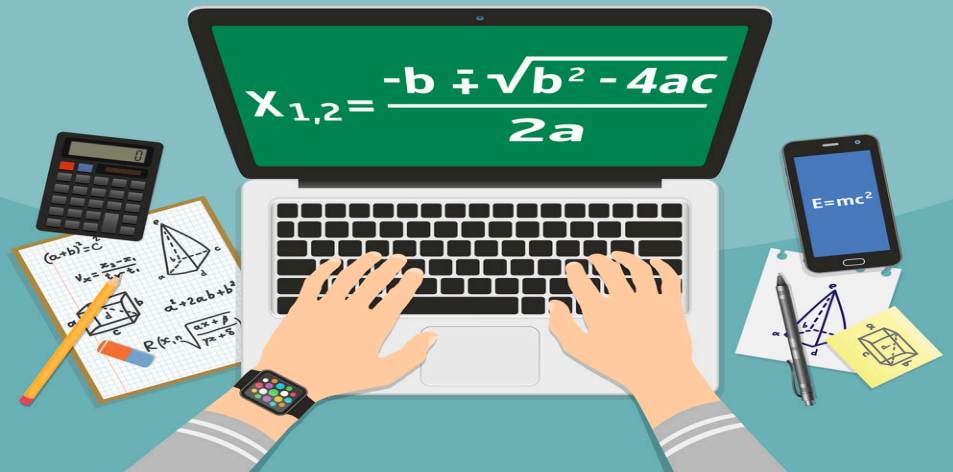




Mental Health Matters

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BACK TO ONLINE SCHOOL



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Virtual Learning & Your Child's Mental Health

Source: onemedical.com By: Devin Collins



Beyond being a place of learning, school is the primary driver of kids' social lives and represents an opportunity for freedom of self-expression. Amid school closures, kids and teens may feel lonely without this regular social interaction. Additionally, online classes may present their own unique challenges. Some children and young adults may have anxiety about keeping up with schoolwork or have trouble concentrating with distance learning. Others may feel self-conscious being front and center on a videoconference screen.

While virtual and distanced learning options may be difficult, there are several ways parents can help their child navigate the transition. Here's how to protect a child's mental health and create a healthy classroom environment at home this school year:

What's Inside

- ✓ Taking Your Mental Health Temperature during COVID-19
- ✓ Parent Self-Care
- ✓ Strategies for Supporting Learning at Home
- ✓ Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults during Coronavirus Crisis

- **Create a designated workspace.** To minimize distractions, designate a quiet part of the house for classwork and homework only.
- **Establish a routine.** Studies show that following a routine can help regulate mood and help ward off depression.
- **Keep them connected.** Schedule virtual playdates, video chats, or phone calls to help with your child's interpersonal skills and emotional well-being.
- **Talk it out.** Your willingness to talk and listen will help your child feel comfortable opening up to you with questions and concerns.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Research shows that practicing mindfulness can reduce anxiety and boost happiness for children at each developmental stage.
- **Play.** Make sure you leave time for your kids to play, have fun, and just enjoy being kids.
- **Practice health habits.** Sleep, nutrition, and exercise are more important than ever right now. A good night's sleep, a nutritious diet, and regular physical activity can boost your child's mood, productivity, energy, and general outlook on life.

Everyone, including kids, is adapting to the pandemic in their own ways. If you're still concerned about your child's mental health, it is recommended that you reach out to your child's health care provider for support.



Taking Your Mental Health Temperature During COVID-19

Source: yalemedicine.org

By: Kathy Katella

Strong emotions during the pandemic are normal, but some may find that their reactions grow worse over time.

You think you're doing OK when out of the blue it hits: a vague uneasiness—a nagging awareness that something isn't right. You're waking up in the middle of the night or you're snapping at loved ones. You miss people, but you don't call them. Fear, loneliness, uncertainty, or some other aspect of the pandemic—and the changes you've had to make—is getting to you. You're not alone.

It may help for people to recognize that strong emotions aren't always a sign of a clinical diagnosis—in fact, they are a normal human reaction to acute stress resulting from a major external event. When people feel threatened or their lives are altered in major, unwanted, and unanticipated ways, communication between the executive center of the brain and the emotional processing center may be disrupted. This leads to the production of stress hormones that can cause distress in the body, as well as the mind. It may include increased heart rate; changes in respiration; muscle tension; irritability; disruptions in sleep, appetite, and concentration; and repetitive thoughts involving danger and helplessness.

For some people, the stressful feelings will resolve on their own; others may want to seek support from a psychologist or other mental health provider. But other people may find that their reactions persist and even grow worse. You should consider seeking professional help if you find yourself overwhelmed by such symptoms as anxiety, exhaustion, fatigue, guilt, irritability, sleep problems, intrusive thoughts, and a reduced capacity to experience pleasure.

What You can do to Manage Emotions

Activities that are good for both body and mind help to lay a foundation that can make it easier for people to manage uncomfortable emotions. Here are some strategies:

- **Control your exposure to the news.** Set a limited time each day for checking the news.
- **Practice mindfulness.** This can be as simple as a 3- to 5-minute meditation each morning.
- **Exercise to strengthen the brain:** Any physical exercise helps, whether it's yoga, walking, or something else, as long as you do it each day.
- **Keep a daily journal:** Writing down the events of the day helps you to process them.
- **Find ways to be social:** Visit people when you can maintain a safe social distance, make phone calls, or schedule Zoom visits. Send cards and emails. Look for a safe way to volunteer your time or help someone in your community.
- **Do something you enjoy.** Watch a movie, listen to music, go hiking, or do some other pleasant activity.
- **Get adequate sleep:** Sticking to a sleep schedule helps reset the body's clock and supports falling and staying asleep. Consistent bedtime routines increase predictability and control.

If feelings of sadness or other emotions are too much to manage on your own, it's important to reach out for help. The right support can set people on a better path. It's not a personal weakness if you're having a tough time now. A lot of people are.

For Parents...

Prioritizing your own well-being benefits your whole family

When you're a parent, self-care often slips to the bottom of the list. But taking care of yourself isn't a luxury. It's essential. And during this difficult time, when children are home and stress is running high, it's more important than ever. Here are five tips from our clinicians that can help.

Make time for yourself

Right now, much of the personal time that was part of daily routines — commutes, time alone at home or at the store, social time with friends — is not available for folks with kids at home. Without it, we have to be intentional about creating space to recharge and decompress. This could look like taking a shower or bath, walking around the block alone (or with your dog), or designating time to read or simply zone out after the kids have gone to bed.

Prioritize healthy choices

The added stress and lack of structure we're all experiencing right now can make it easy to slip into habits that feel good in the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. Make sure you're eating properly, try to get enough sleep (but not too much!), and create a routine that includes physical activity. This doesn't mean pressuring yourself to get into tip-top shape, or not eating ice cream or binging your favorite shows. It does mean being thoughtful and intentional about how you're treating yourself and your body.

Be realistic

Perfectionism and the coronavirus don't mix. It's time to be exceedingly realistic, both at work and as a parent. Avoid burnout by setting realistic expectations and giving yourself grace if you can't meet them. Practice forgiveness and self-compassion. Parents should remind themselves that these are unprecedented times. There's no playbook for this. Remember you're doing your best during a very difficult time. Cut yourself some slack.

Set boundaries

Anxiety is rampant right now. With so much worry and uncertainty floating around it can be easy to absorb other people's fears and concerns without even realizing it. If you have a friend or family



member who's in the habit of sending worst-case-scenario news or is prone to sending anxiety-provoking text messages, practice a little emotional distancing. Let them know you sympathize but that you're taking a break from worrying news, or simply hit the Do Not Disturb button. You can always reconnect when things are calmer.

Reconnect with things you enjoy

Think proactively of things you can do with this enforced time at home. Get back in touch with hobbies or activities you enjoy but rarely have time for, or make the choice to learn a new skill. Maybe there's a knitting project you've always wanted to try, but you've been too busy. Or you've been meaning to learn how to needlepoint. Maybe you love jigsaw puzzles but with rushing between work and home and caring for kids, it's been years since you had the time to do one. If young children make solo activities unrealistic, seek out activities you can enjoy together, like baking bread, or making art.

Finally, remember, being kind to yourself will not only help you stay calm during this difficult time, it will help ensure that you have the bandwidth you need to take good care of your family. When you're running on fumes, caring for others can tax your already depleted resources to breaking point. But when you prioritize your needs, you're filling the tank, emotionally and physically, and that means you'll be in a position to offer comfort and care to others when they need it most.

Source: childmind.org

By: Rae Jacobson

Strategies for Supporting Learning at Home

Source: Child Mind Institute

During the COVID-19 crisis,, parents and other caregivers have suddenly become responsible for managing their children's education at home. With everyone at home together and teachers facing new challenges too, promoting learning can feel impossible. Below are some helpful guidelines and strategies from experts to help families support their children's education at this time.

Preschoolers

While preschoolers are capable of independent play for brief periods of time, parents will need to organize their child's day, set up structured tasks, help with transitions between activities, and provide encouragement.

- ✓ Create structure
- ✓ Check in with teachers
- ✓ Talk to your child
- ✓ Present projects
- ✓ Prompt unstructured play

Students Grades K-2

For most kids, parents have to be more involved during this time than during later grades. Consider the following tips.

- ✓ Plan ahead
- ✓ Collaborate with teachers
- ✓ Remember how powerful your attention is
- ✓ Set realistic expectations
- ✓ Be creative
- ✓ Maintain social bonds

Students Grades 3-6

For most students in this age group, parents still have to be involved in their child's daily learning, but possibly to a lesser degree as they approach the middle school years. Consider the following tips.

- ✓ Plan ahead
- ✓ Collaborate with teachers

- ✓ Use positive attention
- ✓ Set realistic expectations
- ✓ Think beyond traditional schoolwork
- ✓ Maintain social bonds

Students Grades 7-9

There are many things parents can do to support their children during this time. But first remember, you can't do it all. Pick the strategies that work best for your family.

- ✓ Support their organizational skills
- ✓ Create a framework for learning
- ✓ Collaborate with teachers
- ✓ Provide opportunities outside of learning
- ✓ Help them get a good night's sleep

Students Grades 10-12

It will be important for both parents and high school students to be in contact with teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff. Use this opportunity to teach your adolescent how to advocate for their needs, especially as they advance to college or work.

- ✓ Stick to a schedule
- ✓ Set up an effective workspace
- ✓ Support executive functioning
- ✓ Set clear boundaries
- ✓ Build independence

For more helpful strategies for supporting learning at home, visit www.childmind.org.

Supporting Teenagers & Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis

Having teenagers confined to home during the coronavirus crisis may not be as labor-intensive as being holed up with small children, but it definitely has its challenges. While younger children may be thrilled at the prospect of having parental attention 24/7, adolescents are likely to feel differently. Here are some tips for parenting teenagers (and young adults suddenly home from college) during this time.



Emphasize social distancing

The first challenge with teens and young adults may be getting them to comply with the guidelines for social distancing.

Exposure to this virus is an exponential thing, and that it's not really about them. It's not really about the fact that they feel fine. It's the fact that they could be asymptomatic carriers and they could kill others, including their grandparents. One thing to emphasize is that they can't just know that their friends are well. And while they may be comfortable taking that risk, they're also bringing that back in their house. It's also important to help your teenagers understand that no one really knows yet how the coronavirus affects people of different age groups — contracting the virus might be very dangerous for your teenager, even though the facts are still unclear.

Understand their frustration over not seeing friends

For teenagers and young adults, friends are hugely important, and they are supposed to be — bonding with peers is one of the essential developmental tasks of adolescents. If your teen is sulking about being stuck at home with parents and siblings, a direct conversation might be helpful. Acknowledge that you know it's frustrating for them to be cut off from friends. Listen to what they're feeling, validate those feelings and then be direct about how you can work together to make this situation bearable. Loosening rules about time spent on social media, for instance, will help compensate for the socializing time lost with school closings. Encourage them to be creative about new ways to interact with their friends socially.

Support remote schooling

For older students, keeping up with expectations from school can be challenging, especially for those with ADHD, learning disorders or organization issues. You can help teenagers create a realistic schedule for getting work done in defined periods, building in breaks and times for socializing, exercising and entertainment. The key principle: do a session of work first, and then reward yourself with something relaxing. Keep in mind that it's not going to be as effective as school, but it may get to be more effective over time as everyone on the school front, as well as the home front, works to improve remote learning.

Encourage healthy habits

Teenagers and young adults will do better during this stressful time if they get adequate sleep, eat healthy meals and exercise regularly. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, with predictable times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood and their ability to fulfill academic expectations. Healthy habits are particularly important for young people who may be struggling with anxiety or depression.

Validate their disappointment

For many the most painful part of the coronavirus crisis will be losing important experiences: high school sports seasons, proms, theater productions, high school and college graduations. And while we're all missing out on very valued activities, it's especially problematic for teenagers who are wired in their brains to think about novelty and pleasure seeking and seeking out new frontiers to be limited in this way. Give them room to share how they are feeling and acknowledge the real stress they may be under. Then express confidence in your child's ability to rebound.

For more helpful tips for parents with older children at home, visit www.childmind.org.