

Parents of Teens: How to Get Through the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic and Come Out on the Other Side Together

Being the parent of a teen during this remarkable time for our world is filled with unfamiliar challenges – it's new territory. The following is a guide from Rainbow clinical psychologist, Carolyn Ievers-Landis, Ph.D., to get through this and come out on the other side...maybe even stronger and closer than ever.

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR WARM SIDE

Now is the time to show warmth and affection to your teen or teens, in a way that feels comfortable.

- Smile a lot – make certain your teen knows that he or she is loved unconditionally.
- Give your teen a hug, if that's ok.
 - o You know your teen – but if you're not certain, ask before giving a hug.
- Recognize what your teen is doing that is helpful, kind, and brave.
 - o In the middle of all of this, teens need to know that the important adults in their lives recognize all that they are doing – and appreciate the efforts they are making.

GIVE YOUR TEEN AS MUCH INDEPENDENCE AS IS SAFE AND POSSIBLE

Paying attention to local and national authorities' orders and medical professionals' guidance, let your teen make his or her own decisions whenever you can.

- Figure out ways teens can make their own decisions to be safe.
 - o Pay attention to how difficult it might be to be away from friends for now, and tell your teen how you appreciate these efforts.
 - o Notice your teen's healthy behaviors – like carefully washing hands and taking social distancing guidelines seriously.
- Give your teen as much space as possible in your household.
 - o Provide a private area in the home that your teen can go to at times each day.
- Avoid control battles about your teen's activities, and allow your teen to keep in close contact with peers.
 - o Talk with your teen about time spent playing videogames, watching movies/TV shows/YouTube videos, or being on social media.
 - o Ask your teen if these activities are helping to make the situation feel better or worse.
 - o Do not come up with limits on your own – let the teen have a say.

NOW IS THE TIME TO LET YOUR TEEN STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Your teen is old enough to be really helpful to your household and contribute to a better atmosphere for everyone.

- Talk with your teen about what he or she would like to do to pitch in – based upon skills and preferences.
 - o Teens can volunteer for extra duties around the house, like cooking or baking, watching younger siblings, or organizing their bedroom.
 - o There might be family projects in which the teen can play a vital role. Maybe the family is working on cleaning out certain rooms (like the garage or basement) or is setting up a garden or an appealing patio area to hang out in when the weather is nice.

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, BUILD GOOD MEMORIES TOGETHER

When coming out on the other side of this, what will you look back on fondly? How was your teen included in fun activities and important conversations?

- Think about what activities are fun for your teen and support these as a household.
 - o These activities will be different for every teen, but they could be as small as talking about what is happening and letting everyone share their thoughts; listen to and respect your teen's opinions and information gathered from friends or learned online.
 - o Maybe you could all go for walks, enjoy karaoke together, play musical instruments, or color as a family.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR TEEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

How is your teen coping? Some increased stress is completely normal, but look for red flags that might signal that help is needed.

- Notice changes in your teen's behavior
 - o Sleeping a lot more or a lot less than he or she was before
 - o Having more or less of an appetite
 - o Preferring to stay away from other family members most of the time, particularly if this was unusual for your teen
 - o Having difficulty appreciating activities that were enjoyable before, like drawing or talking with friends
 - o Speaking about the future in a way that indicates a lack of hope – avoiding talking about what he or she had planned to do previously

- Pay attention to any mention of thoughts of suicidal ideation, including wishing that he/she could just disappear or that he/she doesn't care about getting the virus.
 - o At this point, it's very important to listen closely to your teen and let him/her know that you are there to talk anytime.
 - o Contact a professional to talk about these concerns in more detail, such as your child's pediatrician, family doctor, counselor/therapist, or a psychologist/psychiatrist. Many are offering telehealth options now.

MAKE THIS A TIME FOR YOU TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER

This is a time for pride.

- Your teen can look back on this time with pride, knowing that going through this together made it better.
- You can also look back on this time with pride for the maturity and resiliency of your teen. Also, be proud of all you did as a parent to offer your love and support!

FOR PARENTS WHO NEED ADDITIONAL HELP WITH TEEN ISSUES AND CHALLENGES, MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT THE LINKS BELOW.

- **National Parent Helpline (www.nationalparenthelpline.org)** (Monday through Friday 10:00 am –7:00 pm PDT)
Call 1-855-2736 for emotional support and advocacy for parents
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness Crisis Text Line (www.crisistextline.org)** (24/7) – Text NAMI to 741-741
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)**
(24/7) – Call 800-273-TALK (8255); Online chat support
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline (www.thehotline.org)** (24/7) – Call 800-799-SAFE (7233)
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline (www.rainn.org/get-help)** (24/7) – Call 800-656-HOPE (4673); Online Hotline