



Adolescent Mental Health Awareness during COVID-19

During this time of crisis, immense disruption, and tremendous change, there are many trauma-informed considerations that parents, and adults involved in the lives of adolescents can employ to help with the emotional impact of COVID-19 with support and care:

Establish and maintain a schedule at home. Creating and maintaining a schedule and a consistent structure can be valuable to foster a sense of security, safety, and help reduce anxiety. Instilling or supporting a routine in your teen's day-to-day activities at home helps create predictability, decrease uncertainty, and offers valuable moments to feel control, especially during these times of upheaval because of the impact of COVID-19. Generally knowing what to expect helps create a healthy structure of purpose for the day and a routine that the youth can depend and rely on.

Engage in activities that support regulation. Sensory-based interventions, because of their ability to support and facilitate functioning in lower parts of the brain that manage traumatic experiences, can be effective to regulate hyperarousal responses. Cognitive- and language-focused interventions can often be limited and unsuccessful in helping youth make sense of and cope with experiences of distress and overwhelming emotions that can be triggered. Engaging in music, art, movement, and other creative practices can be a great outlet for adolescents (or together as a family!) to release feelings and thoughts, as well as create safe ways to support self-soothing, a sense of control, and calm the mind and body.

Sensory-based activities to consider:

- Deep breathing

- Listening to music
- Making art
- Dancing to favorite song or playlist
- Stretching or yoga
- Journaling
- Going outside for a walk

Validate emotions and normalize reactions. Feelings can be difficult to identify and express. Letting adolescents know it is okay to have and express emotions, communicates that their feelings matter and are important. Support emotional expression and development through listening with calm, non-judgmental presence that conveys your support as a safe ally. In times of distress, it is common for adolescents to experience anxiety, worry, and fear. Be attentive to how these emotions may express themselves: through play, drawing, writing, in the body (i.e., stomach aches, headaches, etc.), or their conversations. Use these observations to open a dialogue about these feelings, how your child experiences them, and that you are available to help them. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed much about our everyday lives, relationships, and daily routines. For teens, this has resulted in losses associated with attending school, prolonged separation from friends and extended family, cancellation of familiar group activities, such as play dates, sports, band, and more. Special milestones such as end of the school year celebrations, graduation ceremonies, or holidays are taking a very different form this year. Some youth may experience worries about their own health and the health of others. Being exposed to the anxieties and fears that adults are managing as a result of this pandemic also creates additional worry for children and teens. Resist the urge to make a child's feelings and experiences associated with this pandemic go away. Validate and normalize what they are experiencing in these challenging times.

Foster relational enrichment and connection. Youth who have been exposed to a traumatic event or loss can benefit tremendously when they experience consistent, loving, and involved adults (i.e., parents & caregivers, teachers, coaches, therapists, community group leaders, etc.) in their lives. Youth look to the adults around them to assure that they will be cared for, especially during times of uncertainty. In these times of COVID-19 when youth have experienced physical isolation, displacement, and disconnection, it is important to remember

to create meaningful ways to promote and foster emotional connection with others. Emphasize there are loving, kind, and trusted adults still in their lives to help, protect, and attend to their wellbeing. Relational enrichment can also include getting kids involved in helping the community or participate in volunteer projects (with safe physical distancing practices, working remotely, from home, etc.) that encourage benefiting others during this time and encourage life affirming values such as generosity, kindness, and gratitude. Showing our mindful attention, calm presence, and compassion through the connection of relationship, healthy boundaries, engagement in activities, or community involvement can help kids have an emotionally safe and sound place in this pandemic to feel accepted, valued, and cared for.

Be mindful of media intake and exposure. Breaking news, social media feeds, and broadcast reports about the COVID-19 pandemic happening throughout the world, nationally, regionally, and in our local communities are accessible 24/7. Emotions such as worry, helplessness, confusion, unease, anger, and more can become heightened as a result of this exposure. Constant coverage of COVID-19's impact is overwhelming for adults to manage and make sense of, let alone children and teens. Young people can be particularly vulnerable to ongoing media exposure, influencing their reactions, feelings, questions, and concerns. While it is important to stay informed about COVID-19 from reliable sources, do limit or take intentional breaks from media exposure at home—on television, devices, and online. Adults involved in the lives of youth can serve as positive role models, leading by example and advocating for this need.

Be Well,

Mrs. Lecrenski

Adjustment Counselor