

## Helping teens navigate disappointment in uncertain times

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Many teens are experiencing disappointment as events like prom, graduation ceremonies, school trips and college visits are canceled or postponed due to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to share their feelings about the pandemic with their adolescent and ask how their child is feeling. This is an opportunity to be a role model about how to cope and plan for the future. Be sure that you can express a positive or hopeful plan, the AAP advises.

If your adolescent feels sad, depressed, hopeless, nervous or angry during the COVID-19 pandemic, he or she might need more support.

Ask your pediatrician whether your teen's social and emotional health can be screened in an e-visit. During the visit, the doctor will ask whether your teen has been bothered by problems such as feeling down, depressed or hopeless in the past two weeks. The doctor also might ask if the teen has interest or pleasure in doing things.

Teens often do not have the same symptoms of depression as adults, according to the AAP. Some signs of mental health problems in teens include frequent irritability, changes in weight or sleep habits, repeated thoughts about an unpleasant event and conflicts with friends and family.

As your family thinks about the future, help youths identify and prepare for what's next in life. This way they will be ready to carry out plans and goals.

If your child is planning to attend college in the fall, use the extra time spent with family to make a to-do list. For example, you and your teen can research medical coverage, virtually locate where on campus your child will find health care, fill prescriptions and see what vaccines might be needed before moving into a college dormitory.

It's also a good time to support teens in reflecting and focusing on character traits and behaviors they would like to develop, such as:

- building caring, supportive relationships with family, adults and friends (e.g., through phone calls, virtual visits and letter writing);
- physical wellness and health (e.g., diet, exercise, hygiene and safety);
- emotional and mental wellness;
- decision-making and problem-solving; and
- building confidence and positivity.

Finally, guide your teen toward compassion and empathy. This can help shift focus away from what was lost. Instead, your teen can learn ways to assist others who are affected by an event that no one in modern times has ever experienced.

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