

COVID-19: Tips for Secondary School Families

Families across the country are coping with unprecedented events as the nation takes steps to manage the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Millions of students are home from school, and families are wondering how to keep their kids healthy and learning. Here are some tips from our education experts.

Talk with your teen

- **Speak calmly.** Your calmness will help your teen be calm. Find out what your teen knows about what is going on.
- **Tell your teen the truth,** but leave out unnecessary information that may increase anxiety. Let your teen know you will always try to answer questions. You can find facts about COVID-19 at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.
- **Acknowledge your teen's feelings.** Some teens may be worried. Some may be disappointed about missing cancelled activities. Listen carefully, and let your teen know that it is OK to feel that way. If your teen doesn't want to talk about the situation, don't force it.
- **Reassure your teen.** Explain that by following instructions, like washing hands thoroughly and practicing social distancing, your family is taking action to keep yourselves and others safe.
- **Give your teen a sense of control.** Involve your teen in other decisions about how to move forward, such as setting up daily routines. Establish a time for regular family meetings, and encourage your teen to contribute ideas and suggestions.



Relieve your teen's anxiety

- **Share positive information,** such as the increasing numbers of people who are recovering from the virus and the wonderful acts of kindness occurring all over the world.
- **Help your teen maintain realistic expectations.** Conditions are changing rapidly. The timelines for academic milestones may have to change, too.
- **Encourage your teen to make time for things that matter to him.**
- **Start each day** with pleasant words.
- **Create routines.** A daily routine for waking, eating, learning, playing and sleeping will help your teen maintain a sense of order and continue to learn.
- **Find ways to exercise.** Physical activity is a great stress reliever, and it is a great way to spend time together as a family. Your teen is more likely to exercise if you do it too. You can: have contests—sit ups, push ups, who can maintain a plank position the longest; work out to an exercise video; walk 10 times up and down the stairs; put on favorite music and dance; even do some spring cleaning together.

Support learning at home

- **Have your teen** establish a study area and a daily time for learning.
- **Encourage your teen** to set learning goals.
- **Suggest that your teen** keep a journal of the events of this time and her thoughts about them.
- **Ask your teen** open-ended questions that promote thinking: What would be the downside to being famous? If you could start your own charity, what would it do?
- **Challenge your teen** to track and set limits on recreational screen time.
- **Have your teen** teach you something you don't know. Ask her to explain a biology concept she's learned recently, or to show you how to solve a tricky math problem.
- **Establish a daily** family reading time.
- **Have your teen** tackle a long-term project. It's great to be able to start something just because it's interesting when there's no time pressure.
- **Suggest that your teen** reread this year's class notes.
- **Have your teen work** some math problems every day.
- **Encourage your teen** to make time for daydreaming. Imagining different situations and how they might handle them makes it easier for teens to face challenges.

Promote independence

- **Give your teen responsibilities** at home.
- **Do not do for your teen** what you know he can do for himself.
- **Emphasize the connection** between choices and results. Before your teen acts, encourage him to think about what could happen as a result of his decisions.
- **Applaud your teen** when he makes a good decision. When he doesn't, ask what he learned.
- **Don't try to solve your teen's** problems. Instead, be a sounding board. Ask what options he thinks he has. Continue to ask questions that help him think through the solutions for himself.

Stay connected

- **Help your teen** keep in touch with classmates, friends and family through phone calls, video chat, or social media.
- **Encourage your teen** to write letters or send emails to friends and family.
- **Suggest your teen** decorate your walk or driveway with inspirational messages and pictures for neighbors to see.
- **Help your teen** think of creative ways to interact with friends, such as by playing music or a game together over video chat.