

A guide for parents and carers to support your teenager

The teenage years are a long process of learning how to live independently of your family. Yet young people are suddenly being thrust back into the heart of their families, whether or not they want to be. Social distancing and self-isolation bring challenges for everyone. But teens can find this particularly challenging. They are suddenly cut off from the people they care most about – their friends and their daily routines are disrupted. The initial phase of enjoying the idea of not going to school is replaced by the realisation that they are missing other things; the summer term, the sporting events and more than anything, the routine of getting up and going to school. So how can we as parents help?

Organisation

Find a routine that suits the family and find new ways to arrange your days. What do they need to do (learning, exercise, social time, down time etc.) and what you need to do to make that possible? More structure should hopefully mean reduced boredom and lower anxiety levels.

There will be much more focus on being at home. Get them to help with the practical things - the chores and cooking, for example. Create an atmosphere of 'all in it together' to help them take responsibility and recognise their own value in the family.

At the same time, encourage them to socialise. Screen-time rules may have to be re-evaluated. It's vital for them to keep in touch with their friends in a safe and supported way.

Behaviour

No doubt your child will be relying on digital technology more than ever before. This is fine - but you should still emphasise the need to get enough sleep, to learn new things, to respond to anything their teachers suggest, to be physically active and to have face-to-face time with the family.

Accept that there will be times when they want to get away into their private space and try to make that possible. Talk to them about the virus to help them keep a sense of perspective, which in turn will also help them behave responsibly, despite the frustrations they may feel.

Dealing with anxiety

It's understandable that teenagers will be sad about what they're missing. It's important to acknowledge their losses and to show them that you understand how important these things are to them.

They may find it hard to think about the future. Reassure them that this period will pass. We may see things differently afterwards and there may be ways to make the world better that they haven't yet thought of.

Encourage your child to take control by structuring their days and setting themselves goals. Try to put yourself in their shoes and see things from their point of view. Model good behaviour; if you are calm and rational, they are more likely to be too.

Don't worry about your child falling behind

We've really got to be kind to each other: we are in a time of huge transition and it's extraordinarily difficult. I can sense the anxiety parents might have about children falling behind. Be reassured that your child's teachers continue to work to minimise this and will meet each child where they are when schools reopen. Encourage your child to listen to the advice of their teachers. Completing work on a regular basis will keep them in good learning habits. One bad day will not undo all the hard work children have completed to this point. We are all doing our best in challenging circumstances and your best is more than good enough. If you are worried about a specific subject, please contact your child's class teacher, tutor or Head of Year who will be able to help you.

Be creative

Creativity is all about questioning: How can I...? Why should it...? What would happen if...? How can I make this...? or How can I change this? It's about making sure that children are always being asked those questions to keep them stimulated and distracted. Be creative with time too so that you have time together and set times to work independently with manageable goals.

Managing emotions

It's really important for the children to communicate with their friends and family. Social time is important to prevent children feeling less isolated. It is important for them to know this is a situation that will be affecting everyone; they are not alone. Social time with friends, with parental controls in place to safeguard them, is very important at this time.

Accept that your child may struggle with the restrictions in place and the change to their routine. Be there to talk to them when they need it. Encourage them to share with you or signpost them to the school's support page on Firefly for further support. Mrs Currie, Mrs Watson and Mrs Lenton are all ready to help if needed.

Patience

There will be interesting, diverse scenarios taking place in homes at the moment. Remember that your child is transitioning to the new normal and this will take time. We will all need to increase our communication and accept there will need to be give and take on both sides.

Parents are likely to be concerned and possibly anxious at the new roles they are being asked to play. Please remember, you are not alone in this. The school is here to support you at this challenging time. This new way of living will not be permanent. There's no quick fix, your love and patience are all that is required. This is brand new to us all. To do our best is all we can ask!

