

Parents of Teens: How to Get Through the COVID-19 2020 Pandemic and Out 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 out 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.
 - 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.
 - In the middle of all of this, teens need to know that the important adults in their lives recognize all that they are doing – 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.
 - Pay attention to how difficult it might be to be away from friends for now, and tell your teen how you appreciate these efforts.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - Talk with your teen about time spent playing videogames, watching movies/t.v. shows/youtube videos, or being on social media.
 - Ask your teen if these activities are helping to make the situation feel better or worse.
 - 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.
 - Teens can volunteer for extra duties around the house, like cooking or baking, watching younger siblings, or organizing their bedroom.

- 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 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.
 - 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 on-line.
 - 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
 - Sleeping a lot more or a lot less than he or she was before
 - Having more or less of an appetite
 - Preferring to stay away from other family members most of the time, particularly if this was unusual for your teen
 - Having difficulty appreciating activities that were enjoyable before, like drawing or talking with friends
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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 being with you made going through this together 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! 😊