

What Can Stressed Teens Do About COVID-19? Here Are Some Tips

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For the first time in their lives, teens are facing a worldwide epidemic in the form of a novel coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19. In just a few short weeks, millions of students have made the transition from spending their days with friends and teachers at school to spending all or most of their time at home.

For teens in areas where strict social isolation is the norm, this might mean never leaving the house, spending day after day in a small space with parents and siblings. The

combination of [stress](#), [isolation](#), and no breaks is enough to drive any family to the brink, no matter how happy. And for families with a history of [violence](#), isolation can be dangerous. These strategies can help teenagers manage the crisis, whether it lasts a few weeks, a few months, or longer.

1. LEARN ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

There's a lot we don't know about the coronavirus. That makes it scary. There's also plenty of inaccurate information circulating, from claims that it's a government conspiracy to assertions that the entire United States population will die. Knowledge may help you gain a sense of control. It also helps you identify specific strategies you can adopt to reduce your risk and manage your fear.

Seek information from reliable sources, such as:

- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's coronavirus page](#)
- [The University of Washington's coronavirus map](#)
- [The World Health Organization's coronavirus page](#)
- [The National Institutes of Health coronavirus page](#)

Most state departments of health now offer weekly or daily briefings on the virus, including updated state-level virus counts and death tolls. For a more in-depth understanding and a chance to improve your scientific literacy, [use this Google Scholar search](#) to see recent studies of coronavirus.

One of the most important things teenagers should know about the coronavirus is that their risk of dying is about 0.2 percent. At the height of the epidemic in China, just one person between the ages of 10 and 19 had died from the virus. For young people, the death rate may be similar to that of the flu—so you are likely safe. The people you love may face a much higher risk.

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Public health experts, epidemiologists, and researchers studying the virus all agree: the best way to control its spread is to avoid contact with other people, as well as surfaces infected people may have touched. That means staying home as much as possible and maintaining physical distance from other people—even friends and neighbors you know and love.

The reason for this is that the coronavirus has an incubation period of up to 2 weeks, and maybe even longer. A person who seems well might be shedding the virus and spreading it to others. Avoiding others protects you from people who might have the virus without knowing it. Perhaps more importantly, it ensures you will not spread the virus to vulnerable people such as grandparents or people with disabilities.

Teenagers are relatively safe from the coronavirus. Their symptoms are not as severe, and their risk of dying is very low. That might make it seem like the coronavirus panic is an overreaction, but it's not. This virus has the potential to kill 10% or more of [older people](#) as well as a large portion of people with [chronic illnesses](#) such as diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, respiratory conditions, and more. Your healthy-seeming neighbor might be in danger. Your friend who recovered from cancer could get the virus and die. There's no way for you to know who is in danger, so it's best to treat everyone as a vulnerable person worthy of protection.

3. MASTER A FEW NEW SKILLS WHILE SCHOOL'S OUT

Sooner or later, this will end. Things are already improving in China. How do you want to emerge from this crisis? What new skills can you master? This period of seclusion offers the chance to learn things you never had the time or motivation to do before. Try watching YouTube videos to master your favorite instrument, scheduling video chats with a friend in another country so you can improve your language skills, or ordering a stack of books to help you learn a new craft.

Learning new things gives more structure to your day. It also helps you focus on the future. This reminds you that there is a future beyond coronavirus and can help you remain positive. Find a goal and work toward it, even if you're not sure when you'll get to debut your new accomplishments.

4. ENJOY SOME INDEPENDENCE

Your parents are likely [overwhelmed](#). They may be trying to work from home, stock up on supplies, plan lessons, or care for your younger siblings. One of the very best things you can do to make their lives easier is to reduce their workload. That means asking less of them. For many teenagers, that can be a great thing. Your parents don't have the time or energy to supervise everything you do, to nag you about screen time, or to interrogate you about what you learned today.

So enjoy the independence. Find ways to entertain yourself—and for bonus points, get your younger siblings in on the act, too. Showing your parents that you can make good independent decisions may encourage them to trust you more when things return to normal.

5. TALK TO PARENTS ABOUT RESPONSIBILITIES

Your parents need help. They may be overwhelmed and quick to get angry. They may expect you to know what they need. Work with them to make those expectations explicit. Try drawing up a parent-teen contract

outlining the things your parents need from you every day. If you fulfill those responsibilities, the odds are very good that your parents will gladly give you more independence and let you have plenty of time to yourself. After all, they may be trying to work from home and keep the household running, so they probably have little motivation to police your every move.

6. FIND NEW WAYS TO CONNECT

You may be away from your friends for a long time. Dating is almost certainly out of the question. It can feel like torture, especially if you don't love spending time at home with your family. Times of stress can help you develop creative solutions—and that creativity will serve you well beyond this crisis.

So find new ways to nurture the relationships most important to you. Start a daily group chat with your friends. Schedule video calls throughout the day. Start a blog to share your own experiences. Schedule a weekly virtual get-together. Attend an online [yoga](#) class. Humans need connection, and one of the best ways to protect your mental health is to prioritize your relationships.

FOR TEENS: GETTING HELP IN A CRISIS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The coronavirus crisis doesn't eliminate the many other problems you might face. It only adds another layer of complexity. [This site](#) can help connect you to emergency food and other basics. If an adult is abusing you, contact the [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#) at **1-800-422-4453**. If you feel [suicidal](#), you can get confidential, judgment-free help from the [National Suicide Prevention Helpline](#) at **1-800-273-8255**. [Here are some other crisis resources](#).

If you have a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety, or if the coronavirus crisis is affecting your well-being, therapy can help. Many therapists have switched to an online model, allowing you to safely access care from the comfort of your home. [Begin your search for a quality therapist here](#).

Reference:

Gao, Q., Hu, Y., Dai, Z., Wu, J., Xiao, F., & Wang, J. (2020). The epidemiological characteristics of 2019 novel coronavirus diseases (COVID-19) in Jingmen, Hubei, China. *China CDC Weekly*. doi: 10.1101/2020.03.07.20031393

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