

Involve your teen in deciding their own daily schedule

Structuring one's schedule is important for teens and adults alike. Teens should have input on this, and parents should take into account what works best for their child. Consider together what works best in terms of when to focus on schoolwork and try to stick with this plan. Each child's individual needs and preferences should be taken into account, but for the most part, some kind of structure is definitely recommended during these extended hours at home.

Including your teen on scheduling discussions makes them feel they have a say in their own daily life. No one wants to be forced into something they don't want to do. It's then more of a plan made together versus a parent stating, "this is what you need to do and when to do it." Teens will definitely appreciate having a voice at the table when it comes to their day and parents and teens can work together to build a schedule that works for everyone.



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Helping teens manage their day during Covid-19

"These are unprecedented times." Are you tired of hearing that phrase? Repeated ad nauseum by reporters, politicians and everyone in between when referring to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the words may be true but do little in the way of assisting students to learn and succeed during such times. While not attending school in a brick and mortar building, and adhering Michigan's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" mandate, students and their families have been asked to bypass the customary traditional education process and suddenly manage large amounts of unstructured time in their day while continuing on their learning journey. In an effort to support families during these "unprecedented times," this resource details suggestions for helping your teen manage their daily routine, schoolwork and expectations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINE

"LOSING THE ROUTINES YOU'VE COME TO RELY ON CAN BE A BIG SOURCE OF STRESS."

- JILL EMANUELE, PHD, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AT THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

"One of the most important things to do in the midst of the pandemic is to create structure in the day," says Terrill Bravender, MD, MPH, Chief of Adolescent Medicine at Michigan Medicine C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. "If kids have online school responsibilities, they should get up in the morning and be connected to school during those hours. After the school day is done, then it's done for the whole day and kids can enjoy more free time."

Create boundaries by establishing "school day hours." Maybe it starts at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., but it should be consistent to keep some sense of normalcy and predictability. Break times should be built into school day schedule, where teens can check in with friends or engage in other relaxing/rewarding activities. Remember, teens are used to having lunch period, short breaks between classes and other opportunities for socializing and resting their brain during a typical school day.

And after the school day is done, then it's done for the whole day and teens can enjoy their free time.

Encouraging healthy habits

Teenagers and young adults will do better during this stressful time if they get adequate sleep, eat healthy meals and exercise regularly. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, with set times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood and the ability to fulfill academic expectations.

Healthy habits are particularly important for young people who may be struggling with anxiety or depression. Make sure your child is eating and sleeping properly, being social and engaging in pleasant activities while they are housebound. There's more of a tendency to sleep longer and, while rest is important, remaining active is equally important.

Daily Wellness Checklist

- Did I get 8-10 hours of sleep last night?
- Did I eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables?
- Did I get outside for 30-60 minutes of fresh air and activity?
- Did I drink enough water? (50% of your body weight in ounces)
- Did I challenge myself to get outside of my comfort zone?
- Did I do something fun and relaxing?
- Was I social? Did I reach out to a friend, cousin, grandparent, etc. by phone, text, email, FaceTime or write a letter?

Supporting self-care and mental health

The ways in which we self-care have not really changed much, but may look a little different during this time.

There are several areas of life in which teens can practice self-care during this time: physical, social, familial, intellectual, leisure and spiritual. Parents can help teens think of ways in which some of these self-care areas can be worked on during the stay-at-home order. For example, teens may be allowed to have a little more time on certain social media applications and/or video game consoles, as this is a way that many teenagers tend to connect with each other. This, of course, is assuming their child does not get stressed out or more irritable with such time on the phone or on video games.

Teenagers are perhaps the best generation when it comes to connecting with others socially via technology. While having to stay at home, various methods such as FaceTime, Snapchat, texting and video games can be ways in which teens can connect with their friends from a social perspective. This, of course, must be done within reason. I don't have a magic number for screen time, but parents should understand that such methods of communication may be all that their son or daughter has at this present time to connect with their friends. Being connected with peers is most important to teenagers compared to any other age group. It is a big part of their lives.

At-home exercises can be done to take care of physical self-care needs. There are many workouts that can be easily followed on YouTube without needing any equipment at all. Also, going for walks, runs, or bike rides is perfectly acceptable if social distancing is in effect.

This is also a potential time for families to spend good quality time with one another through dinners, board games, movies, etc. I have had families tell me that they are eating dinner all together for the first time in many years. We live in a time where parents and their children have very active and hectic work, school and extracurricular activity schedules. Although there is opportunity for quality family time, parents should understand that teens will also need time alone in their rooms as well. This is completely normal within reason. We were all teenagers at one point, and I know we all appreciated time to ourselves.

“Being connected with peers is most important to teenagers compared to any other age group. It is a big part of their lives.”

Parents can help their kids make a list of leisure activities that can be done while under the stay at home order. Electronics, movies, TV, arts and crafts, reading, rearranging one's room, painting/drawing, writing, board games, card games and journaling are just some ideas for potential leisure activities. I have also had several teens tell me that they are using this opportunity to clean out their closets, donate old clothes, paint their rooms a new color and rearrange the furniture to give it a new fresh feel in a time of stagnation and repetitiveness. Parents may consider allowing something like this during such a stagnant time.



Validating feelings

“Anything that minimizes what teens are feeling is not helpful. Feelings don't have to make sense or be right or wrong. They just are. You just don't want them to overwhelm you.”

Terrill Bravender, MD, MPH, Chief of Adolescent Medicine at Michigan Medicine C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

For many, the most painful part of this pandemic will be losing important experiences: high school sports seasons, proms, theater productions, graduation. This is a stage in life when social connections and experiences are a healthy and critical part of development. Not being able to see friends, go to school events, play sports, all of this can cause sadness and major disappointment.

Give your child room to share their feelings and listen without judgement (and without reassuring them that “everything will be fine.”) Acknowledge your child's real stress and emotions and express confidence in their ability to rebound.

“The key is for parents to provide empathetic listening for their teens, and also emphasize that we are all in this together.”

Embrace Technology

Technology rules shouldn't completely go out the window – parents should still be mindful of what platforms their children are using and to make sure they are being safe.

But, it's OK to somewhat relax on the rules since kids will now rely on technology daily and for longer periods for school. And this might be a time when it's OK for teens to spend a little more time on social media and their phones to stay in touch with peers.

Work together with your teen to come up with a plan that includes both online and offline time. **Our Family Media Plan** (HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan) tool can help. Allowing your teen to be part of making a media plan can help them stick to it.

Meditation and Mindfulness Websites & Apps



headspace.com/mi - Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the **Stay Home, Stay Mindful** website in partnership with Headspace, a global leader in mindfulness and meditation, and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to provide a new, free mental health resource for Michiganders. **Headspace: Meditation & Sleep** is also available as an app.



Calm - The Calm mobile app promotes relaxation through meditations, sleep stories, nature images and sounds, and is designed to reduce anxiety, improve sleep and help users to feel happier.



HappyNotPerfect – Recommended by Common Sense Media as a “rich resource appropriate for teens and adults seeking more mindfulness.” Five happiness workouts and five daily doses are included for free, but a subscription is required to unlock more content.



The Stop, Breathe & Think (SBT) – This mobile app is intended to help users cope with stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia through mindfulness and meditation.

In addition, YouTube has many channels of nature sounds/meditation music that can be utilized for studying, relaxation or to assist with sleep. Examples: Nature Soundscapes, Relaxing Sounds of Nature, Nature Healing Society and more.

Sources

8 Ways to Help Teens Cope with Social Distancing Blues

<https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/childrens-health/8-ways-to-help-teens-cope-social-distancing-blues>

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A Review of Meditation Apps for Adults

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Daily Wellness Checklist (modified for teens)

Creekside Lifetime Fitness Team



Helping Teens Cope During Covid-19

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Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis

<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

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Teens and COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities During the Outbreak

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But also unplug

For all age groups, and especially adolescents and teens, 30-60 minutes a day of outside time is valuable to their physical and mental health. This could include taking a walk, shooting hoops in the driveway or going to a nature area. The least technology involved the better.

Parents should help teens build outdoor times into their day while maintaining social distance.

“Outside activity helps regulate day and night cycles and reset your brain.”

With many parents working from home during quarantine, families should also carve out unplugged times together. Boundaries between work and family life may get blurred when home is also a work and school environment.

“There’s great value of in having dinner together as a family,” Bravender says. “After a day of working from home and doing online school or connecting with friends on social media, dinner time is when everyone can put that aside and just connect with each other.”



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