

Dear Teens Navigating COVID-19

We see you. On a Friday in the middle of March, you left school with the expectation of returning in two weeks. Two weeks turned into summer vacation and you may have missed      . We never imagined spring and summer would look like this AND we don't know what the 20-21 school year will bring. We know it will be different, but not *how* it will be different. *This is hard.*

It wasn't just school that changed. There were changes to household rules and responsibilities, parental stress levels and, worst of all, changes in how we could "chill" with our friends. Summer looks different too: summer jobs/internships didn't happen, summer camps were cancelled, and the pools didn't open. COVID-19 has changed every part of your life and no one knows how long these changes will stick around or if this IS the "new normal." Holding all of this, it makes sense if you find yourself ignoring, avoiding, or pushing away thoughts and feelings that are uncomfortable. *This is A LOT.* You may relate to some of the experiences below. If so, we offer a few ideas for navigating this tough time.

SUMMER LOOKS DIFFERENT: Boredom and Loneliness Busters

Think creatively about summer employment or volunteer work. Talk with your parent/guardian about what type of job you can safely obtain this summer.

Talk with your parent/caregiver about how you can safely connect with your friends. Create a schedule for when you see friends.

Create a summer "bucket" list with your family or friends. Identify 5 things you want to do this summer: hike a new trail, watch an entire series of a show, learn a new hobby, etc.

DON'T HOLD IT IN

Increased frustration, irritability, and anger are common responses to these situations. Finding healthy ways to release them will help you from getting caught in loops of negative thinking.



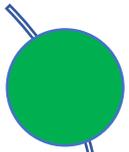
MOVE YOUR BODY: This makes a huge difference! Even 15 minutes of movement will improve your mood. Dance, do a set of jumping jacks, gently stretch your body-- ANY movement will help you release stress.

RELEASE: Throw wet paper towels, paper napkins or wash cloths against an outside brick wall. As you throw them—as hard as you possibly can—name or scream out your frustrations and irritations. Enjoy the satisfying splat as it hits the surface. This can be done with any soft object that allows you to move and release without damaging property.



SLOW THE AVALANCHE OF WORRY

COVID-19 may have created an avalanche of worries. What will school look like next year? What if my caregiver/parent gets sick or dies? Will this ever go away? We tend to worry when there is a lot of uncertainty. Here are some ideas for self-care.



Set A Worry Timer: Allow yourself to worry intensely for 10 minutes. Write all your worries down. Once the alarm goes off, do something you enjoy, thus shifting your attention towards joy. If you can, share your worries with a trusted adult.



Relax Your Body: If you notice discomfort growing in your body (increased heart rate, body temperature changes, etc.), engage in belly breathing. Place one hand on your stomach, inhale deeply into your hand, then exhale letting your hand rise and fall with your breath.



Take a Social Media Break: The constant posting about news on social media can be overwhelming and feed our worries. Take regular breaks of an hour, a day or even a week! When you do, notice what shifted for you. Did you feel a bit lighter in spirit? Have friends joined you in the social media break? What creative ways can you stay in touch or reconnect afterwards?

LEAVING WITHOUT A GOODBYE

Not being able to say goodbye to someone important can leave you feeling sad and frustrated. Consider these ways to voice your feelings:

Create homemade cards or write emails with heartfelt messages and meaningful quotes. Then send them to friends, teachers, and administrators.

Make a care package for a friend with a “this sucks and I miss you” note and drop it off outside their house.

Ask to schedule a video call or a physically distanced visit to give thanks and say goodbye.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT...

Substance Use

It can be really tempting to use substances to cope when things get stressful. However, substances are not an effective way to feel better. The next day the problems are still there, and you are left feeling the same or worse. To manage anxiety or uncomfortable feelings, try writing, meditation, music, talking to a friend, or watching a TV show.

Social Media and Technology

Tracking the number of views and responses to our posts can seem especially important during this time. You may feel angry if someone takes too long to respond to your text or if you are left off group texts. This can lead to repeating thoughts such as “no one likes me,” “I don’t matter,” “everyone else is doing great except me,” “what’s wrong with me?” If this sounds familiar, take social media breaks. Create something. And when necessary, repeat, “I am more than my social media profile, and so is everyone else.”