

Evolve Counseling

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Supporting Your High Schooler During the Quarantine

What your high schooler is likely experiencing:

Loss: Loss of structure, routine, socialization, hobbies, extra-curricular activities, jobs, rites of passage, age-appropriate freedoms.

Fear: Fear of how this will impact their future. Fears for their health and safety, as well as the health and safety of friends and family. Fears of parents losing jobs or if they have lost jobs, how this will impact the family. Fears of things not returning to normal.

Boredom: Are unable to socialize, no routine or structure, no regular schoolwork, no hobbies/sports or extra-curricular activities.

How it is impacting them:

Grief is a completely natural and valid response to what your teen (and likely yourself) is experiencing during this time. The events that have taken place over the previous few weeks are completely traumatic and overwhelming. The loss of the school year, friends, sports and hobbies, as well as some of the most anticipated events of their life (prom, graduation, sports, etc.) is incredibly shocking, overwhelming, scary, and has likely had a significant impact on your teen's emotional well-being.

It is suggested that there are five stages of grief. Your teen is likely experiencing one of these stages currently and will continue to move through the remainder of the stages as time passes (there is a good chance that they will also go back and forth between stages during this time). The stages don't always take place in this exact order; however, here is an example of how your teen might be experiencing grief during this time:

Stages of Grief:

Denial: "There is no way they will close school for the remainder of the school year. That is just crazy!"

Anger: "This is so stupid! How could they do this to us?! Don't they know how important school and these events are?!"

Bargaining: "Okay, I get the school is staying closed, but they can still find a way to let us have prom or our final sporting events, or at the very least, a graduation ceremony."

Depression: "Ugh, this sucks. My life is ruined. I will never get to experience these special memories I have been waiting my entire life for. I am so sad and so hurt. I just want to be left alone."

Acceptance: "This is really painful and unfair. But, when the quarantine ends, I am going to find ways to still celebrate with my friends, even if that means we create our own prom and graduation ceremony together. Either way, I will still find a way to make special memories with my friends!"

How you can help:

One of the most important ways in which you can help your teen during this time is by providing validation and support for their experiences. One approach you can use to do this is by using VIR:

- **Validate:** Remain calm and provide validation for your teen's experiences. Using statements, such as: "That sounds like a lot." "That would be hard." Ensure your child feels seen and heard during this time.
- **Investigate:** Explore how your child is feeling and how this experience is impacting them. Ask questions, such as: "What started the emotion?" "When did you first start to get upset?" "What was the worst part for you?" "Does this kind of thing happen a lot?" The purpose of this step is not to find out "facts" about the situation, but rather to investigate your teen's "perspective" of the situation.
- **Regulate:** Help your teen to feel in control and help them find a solution for their current emotional state. Explore ideas that may help them to feel better and allow them to come up with their own solutions. During this time, their "solutions" might not be feasible. Therefore, it will be important to help them explore more realistic solutions to coping with their current emotions about the quarantine.

Additional ways to help:

- Find ways to celebrate important events now AND plan celebrations for the future.
- Encourage routine and some type of structure (school work, chores, physical activity, sleeping/eating, etc.)
- Be aware of unnecessary expectations. This is likely a once in a lifetime experience, it is okay to allow some leniency in your expectations of normal daily tasks.

How can they help themselves:

While your high schooler might think that watching that hundred million and one TikTok video is the solution to their misery; unfortunately, that might not actually be the answer. Instead, consider suggesting some of these ideas for assisting your teen in managing the sadness and stress of our current situation:

Stay connected: Engage virtually with friends and family as much as possible. Now is the time to call, text, and FaceTime frequently. Consider using other platforms, such as Zoom or Facebook group video chat.

Keep a routine: Going to bed at a reasonable time (preferably before the sun is rising), and waking up before 3pm each day, are very admirable goals during this time. Showering, eating on a normal schedule, and engaging in physical activity daily are also wonderful ways for your teen to regulate mood states.

Try new things: This is a perfect time to try new hobbies that can be done at home. Up until this point, life was often too busy for “new things”... here is their opportunity.

Track your experience: This experience is incredibly bizarre and unprecedented, and therefore will be a very interesting thing to look back on in 20 years. Journaling is a great way to help cope and process through the current situation, as well as a way to track this unique experience.

Seek help: It is really important to be aware of how your high schooler is coping through this experience. While it is certainly a difficult experience for everyone, if you feel your teen is consumed with worry, sadness, or anger, please reach out to find them additional help.

Resources:

Evolve Counseling’s Videos on Parenting During the Quarantine:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCixDJOG0ppudTvvI3XXQtfw>

37 quarantine graduation ideas for the class of 2020:
<https://www.today.com/shop/37-quarantine-graduation-ideas-class-2020-t180186>

Experiencing and coping with grief from your teen’s perspective:
<https://teenstrongaz.com/grieving-what-has-been-lost/>
<https://teenstrongaz.com/coping-with-the-grief/>

The Parents’ Guide to Handling Teenagers During Quarantine:
<https://twentytwowords.com/parents-guide-to-handling-teenagers-during-quarantine>