

Helping kids manage summer and fall during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the novel coronavirus pandemic continues into the summer, we've had to change plans for events, vacations and milestones. Schools around the country have been closed, and many are announcing plans for the fall that look different than last year. People are experience quarantine fatigue with the novelty of the situation wearing off, and now that most kids are out of school, they're faced with even more unstructured time. Normal summer routines of camps, outings with friends and other activities aren't necessarily an option this summer. Children and adolescents are likely having more feelings of sadness, anger and frustration.

Cities and towns are "reopening" from strict isolation rules. What should I tell my kids about COVID-19 now?

Always review the latest information about the virus from reputable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Get the facts about current federal and state recommendations and consider these tips:

- **Redefine what it is.** COVID-19 is caused by a germ (virus) that can make the body sick. People who have COVID-19 may have a cough, fever and trouble taking deep breaths. But some people who have the virus may not feel sick at all or may have mild symptoms such as those of a cold.
- **Explain how it spreads.** Remind your children that most commonly, the COVID-19 virus enters people's bodies when it's on their hands and they touch their mouth, nose or eyes. The virus is so tiny that you can't see it. If someone who has the infection coughs or sneezes on you from a close distance — less than six feet — that also can spread the virus. That's why we must continue our social distancing.
- **Talk about what's being done.** COVID-19 remains in the news because it's still impacting communities. Experts around the world continue to learn more about COVID-19 and how to keep people safe.
- **Remind kids about ways to stay safe.** Encourage frequent and proper hand-washing — especially when coming home, before meals, and after blowing the nose, coughing or sneezing. Show them how to sneeze or cough into a tissue and throw it in the trash or cough into a bent elbow. Remind them not to touch their faces. Follow local orders for wearing masks and other personal protective equipment when in public.

How do we address missed events, celebrations and traditions?

The list of what's been disrupted is endless – birthday parties, weddings, funerals, graduations, dances, trips, baby showers and holidays. Since we can't host or attend gatherings beyond our household members to mark holidays or events, finding other ways to stay in touch and acknowledge special days is crucial.

- **Acknowledge the disappointment.** Allow your child to have their natural emotional experience. Try using words that join them in their feelings (e.g., "I'm so sorry this is happening. I'm disappointed I won't get to ____."). Sometimes we can try to jump too quickly to feeling better, but it is OK for your child to talk about their reactions. Allow them to have some alone time, write a letter about how they feel or talk about the things they will miss.
- **Focus on what can be controlled.** While many events have been postponed or canceled, encourage your child to plan special events virtually or when restrictions soften. Perhaps a trip with best friends, belated birthday celebration or a post-graduation party. Focus on positive events that can take place in a few months. Envision how you can celebrate, and maybe even start making plans now.
- **Explore alternative celebrations.** Although nothing will completely replace in-person events, a growing number of virtual events offer ways to celebrate in a less traditional format. From video conference dance parties in place of a prom to FaceTime play dates, children and teens are connecting in alternative ways.

What can I do to help my child who is feeling isolated?

- **Encourage your child to stay connected.** Social distancing doesn't mean total isolation. Maintain contact with peers through phone calls, social media or video conferencing.
- **Suggest a new hobby or learn something new.** Your child is likely having more time on their hands. Encourage them to challenge themselves by trying something new.
- **Connect with other parents.** Talk with other students and parents about how you might start planning events for after we emerge from this pandemic. A plan can be a good way to remind kids that their accomplishments matter and won't be forgotten.
- **Make sure your child is still active.** Encourage physical activity, mindfulness and brain stimulation. Include these activities in the daily schedule. Also, consider making the activities fun by setting some sort of family challenge.
- **Be present and positive.** During this time, set an example for your children by using daily positive affirmations. Share what you love about them or how they have made you proud. You can also identify examples of how the family has gotten stronger, together. Instead of anticipating anxiety about the future, make an effort to focus on the present moment.

While this is a challenging and uncertain time, remember it will not last forever.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

Sources:

"Coping with Disappointment During COVID-19 - Children's Health." Children's Health, Children's Health, www.childrens.com/health-wellness/4-tips-for-coping-with-disappointment-during-covid-19.

"COVID-19: Talking with Your Kids and Helping Them Cope." Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 17 Apr. 2020, www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/kids-covid-19/art-20482508.

Twymom, Kamilah. "What to Do If Your High School Senior Is Struggling Through the COVID-19 Pandemic." Nationwide Children's Hospital, 27 Apr. 2020, www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/04/high-school-senior.