



How to monitor the pandemic's impact on the mental health of children and teens—and when to seek help

As the pandemic stretches on, questions and concerns are increasing about the long-term impacts the distancing restrictions, school closures, and overall isolation will have on children and adolescents. After all, children and teens are experiencing the pandemic during crucial developmental periods for social and coping skills. While experiencing stress, anxiety, and frustration is normal for kids navigating an unknown and ever-changing situation like the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents and caregivers find themselves wondering how to gauge their child's mental health and when to seek help.

Although it's too soon to tell what the pandemic's long-term mental health effects will be, parents and caregivers are right to be concerned and vigilant as they continue to assist children and teens. Use the following tips as a guide.

Communicate and set an example

- **Be direct.** Talk openly with your kids about their concerns and fears related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing information to help them understand and address their concerns can help reduce anxiety and depression. As you share information, consider what's appropriate for the child's developmental age. If you're not sure what to share, consult your child's pediatrician for guidance.
- **Establish a routine.** With so much uncertainty, help your child maintain a regular schedule as much as possible, including consistent bedtimes and wakeups.
- **Model behaviors.** Don't forget to tend to your own stress-management and mental health so that you're able to model behaviors and create a supportive environment for kids and teens.

Take action

- **Foster resilience.** Help children and teens develop a sense of control by practicing resilience-enhancing activities. Examples can range from habits that keep them healthy, such as personal hygiene and social distancing, to self-care skills like yoga, meditation, practicing gratitude, and community volunteering.
- **Encourage activity.** From regular exercise through creative pursuits like art, music, and cooking, help children and teens take a break from screens.
- **Support social interactions.** Whenever possible and safe, encourage kids and teens to engage with friends and peers.
- **Monitor screen time.** Even as school returns to in-person classes, put guidelines around the time spent in front of screens, smartphones, and social media.
- **Intervene early.** School performance is an important indicator of mental health for both children and teens. Take action right away if you see a decline in performance.
- **Secure weapons and medications.** Ensure that any weapons and medications (both prescription and over-the-counter) in the home are secured and inaccessible to children. Monitor other potential weapons, such as kitchen knives.

Reach out for assistance

- **Know your resources.** Make yourself aware of local resources available for urgent or emergency situations should they arise. For example, texting “HOME” to 741741 will connect you with a crisis counselor, and the National Suicide Prevention Hotline can be reached 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255.
- **Seek help.** If your child or teen is showing signs of distress or depression, contact your company’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you have access to that benefit or consult with your child’s primary care physician, who may refer you to a behavioral health specialist.