



Topics Covered

- Impact of COVID-19 on teens/tweens
- Strategies for parents
- Strategies for teens
- Final Thoughts

Mindful Mondays

03/30/2020

Last week's newsletter was centered around the importance of maintaining your routines and acknowledging some of these abrupt changes through adding something new to your days. This week, however, I'd like to address a growing concern that has been on my mind, and likely the minds of all parents, providers, and adults working with our youth. How have they been holding up? Has the cabin fever set in for them, too? Has the transition to remote learning been as easy and seamless as they make it out to be? What can I do to help when I begin noticing emotional changes in my kid or teenager? What are the differences between how each age group is coping?

For the next few weeks, this will be the central topic of Mindful Mondays to address parent concerns and questions regarding our teenagers, school-agers, and preschoolers. As we progress through each week a new age group will be presented along with strategies for parents and strategies for our kids to utilize in these trying times.

This week will be focused on teenagers as social distancing and the pandemic have been extremely disruptive for them on many different levels.

Teenagers are in the midst of an odd time developmentally. They're gaining a sense of who they are, and who they want to be. Long-term goals are becoming more and more realistic. Reliance on caregivers and parents are beginning to lessen as they develop a sense of independence and power over their own being. Peers are becoming a vital source of validation for their emotions, thoughts, identity, appearance, etc. But what happens when that source of validation is wiped away, when those goals become delayed or disrupted, or when that sense of power becomes powerless?

Below you will find information on COVID-19's impact on teenage mental health along with strategies for both parents and teens to use in order to better cope with this uncertainty as a family and as individuals

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Impact on Teen Mental Health

- **Wide-Ranging Emotions**
 - Anxiety
 - Boredom
 - Sadness
 - Anger
 - Intense Frustration
 - Happiness
 - Excitement
 - Sense of relief
- **Mood Swings**
 - You may notice your teen displaying anxious and isolating behaviors, due to the virus, suddenly swing to happiness and needing freedom
- **Newfound Sense of Invincibility**
 - Teens have a knack for feeling invincible, for feeling as though no harm will come their way, and in this situation they're kind of right. They are not part of the demographic that is at high risk, and they will argue with you until the end of time to prove it
 - This sense invincibility is developmentally appropriate as teens use it to confidently explore and learn about their world through interaction with others
 - However, it can also become excessive during times when typical developmental milestones have been halted and delayed. Their response is an attempt to continue meeting their milestones by maintaining control of their lives
- **Adjustment and Loss**
 - Teens can be both flexible and rigid during times of change and may have a hard time fully adjusting to new norms
 - They may challenge and test the boundaries related to this "new norm"
 - Teens are also grieving the losses of typical rites of passages that have been cancelled or likely will be cancelled in the coming weeks (Sports, Proms, Graduations, College visits, etc)
 - With these losses may also come anxiety surrounding future perceived losses, bargaining to gain access to lost experiences, and worry about whether future goals will be achieved
- **Hopelessness and Depression**
 - Teens may express feeling like this will never end or feeling like things may never get better
 - Increased fatigue
 - Lack of interest in typical activities

Memes for Distraction

HOW TO PROPERLY
GREET SOMEONE DURING
THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



WHEN CORONAVIRUS SHUTS DOWN SCHOOL



When you leave your house
after 21 days of quarantine:



Strategies for Parents

• Be Prepared for Friction

- It is normal and should be expected during these times
- Set firm expectations and boundaries in your home regarding rules and limits pertaining to social distancing practices
- Refer to those expectations during conversations with your teens and stick to them
- Base expectations off established guidelines from local authorities & government
- When the friction gets too hot have a plan to cool down
 - Your expectations, rules, and limits will not be understood during moments of intense emotion
 - The cooler you can stay the more likely you will be heard. **More importantly, the more likely you will be able to hear and validate your teen's emotions.**

• Create Space for All Emotions

- Teens will experience a wide range of emotions at different times and at the same time
- Creating a space that allows for expression of mixed emotions will not only help your teen cope, but it will likely lead to developing a healthier connection between you and your teen
- Empathy and Validation are powerful tools
 - Identify the emotion(s) they may be experiencing
 - Express an understanding/seek an understanding of what they are feeling and why
 - Let them know they're feelings are valid
 - "I feel the same way"
 - "You're right, this is really hard"
 - Provide encouragement and hope

• Help Establish Balance Between Online/Offline

- Encourage connection between your teen and their peers
- Less face-to-face interaction should be balanced with increased communication with peers online/over the phone
- Ensure that this rebalancing continues to allow for healthy development (sleep, learning, physical activity)

• Allow for Privacy and Independence

- We need it, they need it
- Space allows teens to recharge, process, ponder, vent, etc.
- It is developmentally appropriate for teens to seek out independence and is important to not take offense to times when teens are exercising that need

• Include Teens in Decision-Making/Problem-Solving

- Including teens in these processes will give them an appropriate sense of control and independence
- Teens are creative and can be helpful in these processes
- Empower them to be a helper

• Ask Questions

- Check-ins are important and resistance is often a typical response; the end goal is to create an open line of communication
- Ask about:
 - Their friends, teachers, idols, and how they all are coping
 - Their routines, how they are passing the time, their needs
 - Their health, sleep, eating/appetite, concerns

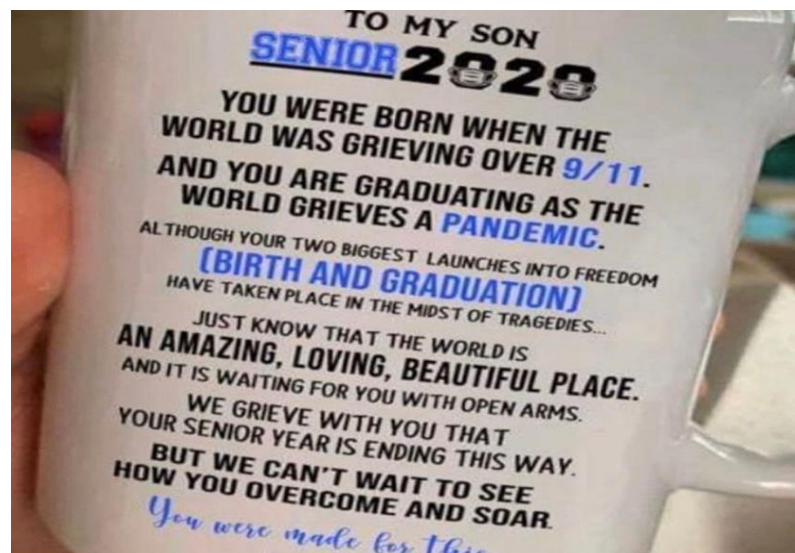
- **Support Remote Learning**

- Help your teens develop a routine and schedule if this is not currently a skill they possess
- Provide a space conducive to their learning needs
 - Comfortable
 - Minimal distractions
 - Not the bedroom (if possible)
- Rely on the simple template of complete a task or group of tasks with a scheduled reward following the task (i.e. 2-3 hours of schoolwork → 30-40min of video games, cell phone, etc)

- **Get Creative**

- While relying on local trends and government guidance, get creative in how you support your teens needs for social interaction with peers
- Explore ways to remain socially distant from peers while outside of the home (ex. 6ft apart hikes or walks)

For parents out there with a senior, please check out the image below and be excited to see your senior soar.



I've purposefully separated the parenting and teen strategy sections to allow you to hand this to your teen(s) and let them review on their own. Below you will find strategies that your teenagers can use to cope with these uncertain times. Please feel free to review it and have conversations with your teens about it. However, I encourage you all to share this with them prior to any conversation about what they can be doing.

Memes for Distraction

Teenagers who tp'ed their neighbour's house:



The neighbours who just got free toilet paper:



Why are the annoying servants staying in my home all day now?

WHEN THE WIFI IS OUT



Strategies for Teens

- **Anxiety is a Normal Response to Uncertainty**
 - Anxiety is an emotion that comes from a place focused on alerting us to and protecting us from things that can harm us and others
 - It is meant to protect and prepare us and is a normal response to dramatic changes that have occurred over the past few weeks
 - Your anxiety will keep you safe and keep your community safe
 - At times, anxiety becomes hard to turn off or ignore, attempting to ignore it may end up making it louder
 - Create a plan with a trusted adult to reduce anxiety when you begin noticing it hanging around more often than you are used to
- **Ask Questions, Share Concerns**
 - It is okay to have questions and concerns during this time, whether they are about yourself and potential symptoms, or the impact of all of this on your family, friends, etc.
 - The more you can communicate your questions and concerns, the more answers you will get. What is most important is ensuring your health, your family's health, and your community's health
- **Inform Yourself Through Reliable Sources**
 - During times of anxiety it often helps to have accurate information regarding questions or concerns you have
 - Seek those answers out from reliable sources
 - Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - World Health Organization (WHO)
 - UNICEF
- **Distract Yourself**
 - Make a list of what you can and cannot currently control
 - Distractions are meant to help us with the list of things we cannot control. They can help us refocus and take our thoughts away from what we cannot control by directing them to things we can control
 - Consider playing video games, coloring, doing yoga, dancing, acting, being silly. The options are endless
- **Find New (or Old) Ways to Connect**
 - During school days you had tons of time to socialize and connect with your friends during breaks, lunch, bus rides, etc.
 - Plan to connect with your friends during those same times
 - Have virtual lunches while taking a break from remote learning
 - Check in with your friends at the end of the day as you would when class lets out
 - Consider something new like writing letters or sending notes like your parents would back in the day
- **Focus on Yourself & Your Interests**
 - Being home all day means you'll have a lot of time on your hands, have you been wanting to learn or try something new? Do you have any interests you haven't had the time for? You may now
 - Explore your interests and take a chance to dive deeper into them with this extra time, you won't regret the opportunity
 - There are also a lot of free resources online and on YouTube to learn new activities and trades like guitar, painting, or even jiu jitsu
- **Acknowledge Your Feelings**
 - You've experience so many losses in the past few weeks and you may experience more before this is all said and done
 - If you're angry, be angry; sad, be sad. The more you allow yourself to feel these tough feelings, the faster you'll start to feel better



When you are chosen as a tribute to go buy groceries during quarantine.



QUARANTINE DAY 17

MY PARENTS ARE SHARING MEMES WITH ME NOW

me when i call it COVID-19 instead of the rona



- When you begin to process your feelings (meaning thinking about them, seeking perspective, and planning how to move forward with or without them) you can do it in any way you see fit:
 - Some people like to share and discuss their feelings
 - Some people like create things
 - Others like to give back
- The options are truly endless, what works for you?
- **Move Your Body & Breathe**
 - Movement and exercise are important for both your physical and mental health
 - Challenge yourself to break a sweat each day for at least 30 minutes. Maybe its running, maybe its lifting, maybe its yoga
 - Track how you feel before, during, and after
 - During down times, spend some time focusing on your breathing
 - Take full depth breaths for 3-5 seconds and exhale for 8-10 seconds
 - Challenge yourself to remain focused only on your breathe and track how you feel before, during, and after
- **Be Kind, Show Gratitude, and Be Inspiring**
 - Kindness is a powerful action, and gratitude is a powerful emotion, both of which are helpful in letting us forget, refocus, move forward, and feel empowered
 - Extend a helping hand during these tough times, show thank to those that have helped you, and encourage others to do the same!

Final thoughts:

How are all of you doing? I sometimes wonder that as the weeks proceed, and beneath the surface of frustration, anxiety, and fatigue, we are all slowly becoming more efficient and more adjusted to this new way of life. Let your teenagers be the prime example of this, they are learning every day how to become more efficient, how to adjust to a new norm, and how to take what life gives them and make it their own. It will be easy to look at how tough these days have been, but I encourage all of you to begin looking at how today was better than yesterday. Where did you find happiness and how can you replicate that tomorrow? This virus is the result of replication and transmission; our happiness can result from the same exact function too.

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