

How to help kids cope with social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic

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As we have taken important steps to practice physical distancing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, virtually all children and teens have had much less interaction with their peers than they typically would.

Peer support is a very important part of childhood and adolescence, as friendships provide support, mitigate feelings of loneliness and boredom, help build a sense of belonging, and encourage identity development. As caregivers, it is important that we promote resilience and help children cope with not being around their peers during this time. For any caregivers who are struggling with how to help children cope with social isolation, there are many things you can do to help:

Encourage creative ways to connect with others:

Help your child come up with creative methods of spending time with their friends. The safest way for your child to talk or play with people outside their household during this time is through video chats or phone calls. One way is to encourage a weekly video chat with a friend or family member. Older children and teens may prefer texting or playing online games with friends. This might require temporarily loosening rules about daily screen time. Children might also enjoy writing letters to their friends. Here's a few more ideas:

- Schedule “social time” each day, so your child can look forward to it.
- Scavenger hunt walk in the neighborhood
- Create arts and crafts together with friends. Choose a project and supplies in advance and make the same craft as friends over video chat.
- Video chat with other family members and friends.
- Set up calls or video chats to allow your child to spend time with extended family and other people important to him or her. You might ask a relative to read a story to your child over the phone or on a video chat. Or, invite family members or friends to a video chat party.



Seek daily purpose:

Kids and teenagers often thrive on daily purpose. Spending time doing activities they care about or value can give your child's day meaning and help them cope with social isolation. Your child might find meaning through reading, biking, creating music, making movies, baking, dressing up, drawing, writing, planting a garden or building something.

Encourage your child's unique creativity. To motivate them, consider organizing a family reward board, where for example, by doing something like riding their bike they can earn a sticker working toward movie night.

Older kids might enjoy researching a topic that they're passionate about and sharing what they've learned with friends.

Children and teens often feel rewarded when they help others. Consider encouraging them to find ways to connect with their larger community, like making crafts for the local senior facility, picking up litter around the neighborhood, doing yard work for a neighbor, or finding a safe way to volunteer.

Talk about feelings:

Your child might feel sad about missing an important social event, such as a birthday party. Acknowledge your child's loss, ask about his or her feelings, and validate them by showing that you understand. Allow your child to lead the discussion, rather than making assumptions about how he or she thinks and feels.

You also might consider giving your child an age-appropriate book that deals with loneliness. This can give your child words to describe his or her feelings. Or, have your child write down what they miss about certain people, places or events as a way to cope. Also, explore different ways he or she might cope with these kinds of losses, such as having a different kind of birthday celebration or planning something for when social distancing is no longer needed. [Here's more tips for talking to kids about disappointment and celebrating special events in a creative way.](#)

Your wise mind vs. your emotion mind

Your wise mind can take in new information, be flexible considering alternatives, and be creative in thinking of solutions. Your emotion mind will urge you to give up, act impulsively or rage. Wait for your wise mind to lead, and make decisions and problem solve with your wise mind.



We cannot control the pandemic, but we can control what we do with it. Your child cannot control the current need for social distancing, but they can control how they choose to deal with the circumstances.

By encouraging your child to connect with others, share his or her feelings, and find daily purpose, you'll help him or her cope with inevitable challenges associated with this pandemic. Working through this challenge also might contribute to your child's personal growth and better prepare him or her to deal with future obstacles.

We know children and teenagers will continue to struggle being separated from friends as the pandemic continues. Given the importance of peer support, try to acknowledge the loss your children are experiencing, and work in your wise mind to problem-solve and find ways to continue to find peer support. After all, as the Beatles so eloquently stated, "I get by with a little help from my friends."

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