



# How to Help Your Teen Cope with COVID-19 Cancellations

To high school seniors, schools being closed doesn't equal a vacation – to them, this is time they won't get back with their friends. It's normal for teens to feel anxious during this period of their lives, as they close one chapter and begin another. However, teens may feel especially anxious as they realize they may never walk through their high school hallways again, attend prom, perform in their final theater production, compete in their final season, or celebrate graduation.

If you're a parent or guardian of a teen who is struggling with a loss of control and trying to cope with cancelled celebrations, here's tips for talking about it and coping.

## **Allow your teen to grieve**

For most high school seniors, sometime in March 2020 they unknowingly experienced their last regular day of school with so many things left undone. I'm sure there were tears shed as this realization set in, along with confusion, anxiety and despair at the loss of their senior year.

During this time, it will be important to allow your student to cope and grieve in her own way. Some students will cope by throwing themselves into their academics, focusing on end of the year projects, and last-minute scholarship applications. Others may struggle through the typical stages of grief — denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance. It is typical to jump back and forth between these stages.

As a parent, you may find yourself in a similar boat — accepting the new normal, only to be saddened the next day when you realize another disappointment due to COVID-19. This is normal. Many people feel like this when experiencing a loss of control over their circumstances.

## **Use dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) skills to help you feel back in control**

During this time of uncertainty, your teen may be struggling with a loss of control. Using skills associated with dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), you and your teen can help to regain that lost sense of control.

## **Accept your emotions**

What you are going through is not normal. What is normal is feeling emotional in these circumstances. Remember, you are the boss of your emotions. Name the emotion and put a label on it. Take a break and spend some time soothing yourself. The idea is to not let your emotions stop you from doing what you can.



## STOP

This stands for **stop**, **take** a step back, **observe** and **proceed**. Take a step back and observe your emotions. Let your emotions calm. Then observe the situation as you would if it were someone else facing it. What would you tell someone else to do?

## Practice radical acceptance

Radical acceptance is the complete and total acceptance of reality. This means that you accept the reality in your mind, heart and body. You stop fighting against the reality and accept it.

## Use your wise mind

Make decisions about the situation with your wise mind. Your emotion mind will urge you to give up, act impulsively, rage, or give up when faced with disappointment. Wait for your wise mind to be in charge. Your wise mind can take in new information, be flexible in considering alternatives, and be creative in thinking of solutions.

## Marking the milestone

Taking the time to celebrate milestones is an important stepping stone in a person's life, and an opportunity to observe achieving a goal or the fact that someone is entering a new stage in life. A high school graduation marks a time of academic success and transition to adulthood. Even though the current senior class' year was cut short, it does not make their efforts any less significant.

Senior commencement ceremonies have always been just as much about the students' past accomplishments as a view toward their future. Particularly, in these times, it will be important to highlight their strengths and virtues as they enter the adult world. Finally, marking this milestone is also an opportunity for the caregivers, teachers, family and friends, who have watched them grow and work hard for this moment, to share in the student's triumphs and acknowledge their hard work.

## The celebration

The celebration or milestone you and your student had originally envisioned may not look the same today, but it can be just as memorable. Take time to talk through what is important to you and your student and find creative ways to make it happen. Here are some ideas to get you started:

**Mom wants pictures** – While practicing social distancing, find a friend or hire a photographer to shoot pictures of your senior in a cap and gown in a lovely outdoor setting.



**The student wants to dance** – Use Zoom to meet up with friends and have a virtual prom.

**Teachers want to see you in your cap and gown** – Organize a drive-by parade around the school

**Dad wants to brag** – Use FaceTime or Zoom to connect with family and friends. Think about putting a slide show together of your child through the years. Senior, don't forget to wear your cap and gown.

**Friends want to graduate together** – Create a virtual meetup on Zoom, or practice safe-distancing in a park to 'move the tassel' from right to left and throw your caps in the air.

**Siblings want to participate** – Decorate the family car, driveway or front lawn with well-wishes

**Congratulations to the senior class of 2020!**

**Best wishes for your new adventures.**

*<https://blog.chocchildrens.org/help-your-teen-cope-with-covid-19-cancellations/>*



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