

MANAGING TEEN ANXIETY OVER COVID-19

This Covid-19 pandemic is affecting so many groups of people in different ways. For teens, the momentary high that scrapping of exams may've brought has swiftly been replaced by concerns over the long-term impact of what not having real results may mean.

Socially, their wings have been clipped before they were even able to take flight. Exciting summer plans of inter-railing, festivals and 18th birthday parties, even fledgling romances have all either been shelved or have dark clouds hanging over them.

Given all that, it's not surprising that teens may well be experiencing degrees of anxiety. Here are 11 tips to help them manage this challenging situation.

Acknowledge their Feelings

Much as we may want to make everything right for our kids, there are some things we just can't fix. It's important to recognise how this impacts them and that it will rob them of many teen-hood rites of passage. Acknowledging that this really is a rubbish time for them won't necessarily solve anything, but it will be helpful and of value to know that they are being listened to.

Anxiety is Normal

It's worth reminding them that anxiety is also a normal part of emotional responses and not necessarily symptoms of a mental health issue or anxiety disorder. As above, the simple act of acknowledging that anxiety is a normal and expected response to this current situation may be helpful to them.

Use Anxiety to Spur Practical Action

If your teen is worried about germs or getting sick, this can translate into giving them the momentum to take positive actions towards health and safety or learn about the health guidelines and follow them. Get them to minimise their risks by taking on board actions like hand-washing, not touching their face, sneezing into their arms and other recommendations.

Keeping Perspective

Given that teens do have grounds to feel anxious right now, it's important to keep the situation and associated worries in perspective. Talking about other world issues, considering how the pandemic is affecting more vulnerable people can help with this. Also consider looking at the facts together, talking through risks and real levels of danger. It's also useful to discuss potential positives from the situation – such as improvements to pollution levels, which were previously thought impossible.

Limit Updates

Watching news channels constantly or being glued to emotive Whatsapp groups or other social media may exacerbate their anxiety and make it feel more overwhelming than it should be.

Sleep

The importance of sleep in combatting anxiety will probably not be new news for them, but in this new reality, it's worth stressing it and ensuring that your teens actually do get enough shut-eye and don't end up on their phone or other media till the early hours.

Change Focus

They will feel better if they are helping others. To be honest, we all will. Inertia and feeling helpless can have a debilitating effect on mental health, so taking some proactive measures to help others can really help reduce stress levels. At least they can feel they are 'doing something to help'.

Managing Disappointment

Their frustration – anger even - at missing out on various milestone social events will be understandable. It may help them to rationalise it by explaining that making these sacrifices makes them responsible global citizens working for the greater good. Their losses will help to reduce the spread of the virus and protect those who are more vulnerable either in the family or the wider community.

Fight the Rumour Mill with Facts

There are so many rumours flying around, if you think your child is being fed false or alarmist material by peers or social media this may well be fuelling their anxiety. Try to ensure that your child has the real facts from reliable sources and provide some balance to negative stories with positive information.

Do Something Else

It's tempting to get so sucked into the Covid-19 situation that we can't think of anything else. Take the blinkers off and look at some comedy, listen to some music or do anything else that is not related to the pandemic. Taking their mind off the situation for short bursts will help reduce their anxiety levels.

Modelling your Behaviour

Kids of all ages feed off our emotions and reactions, and teens are no exception. If we are obsessively fretting and anxious about Covid-19, the chances are they will model that behaviour and are more likely to be anxious themselves. Try to stay calm yourself and follow the steps above too if you think it will help bring down anxiety levels for the whole family.