

Managing your teen's anxiety during the pandemic

October 29, 2020 | by [Jacqueline Sierzega, PsyD](#)



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Due to the global pandemic, our world is full of more unknowns than ever before. Everything feels new and different, and with the pace at which things are changing, we're all living outside of our comfort zones.

This is causing anxiety for many, which is a normal reaction to dealing with the many life changes we're experiencing. For

children and teenagers, certain components of this new world can be especially anxiety-producing, such as:

- **Social distancing:** The impact of loss of leisure time and activities for children and teens has been far-reaching. At a time when peer contact is incredibly important to well-being, kids have not been allowed to socialize, attend school normally, participate in sports activities or use playground equipment. The loss of this social connection beyond their immediate family has caused a significant increase in anxiety. This may be especially challenging for children with less than ideal home lives. Additional quarantine-related problems include increased risk of depression, irritability, insomnia, anger and emotional exhaustion. A recent review shows that post-traumatic stress symptoms occur in 28 to 34%, and fear in 20%, of children in quarantine.
- **E-learning:** The pivot to e-learning during the pandemic also causes an increase in adolescent anxiety. Frustration with the change in format or technical difficulties seem to increase anxiety while also decreasing the amount of intrinsic motivation a child feels about schoolwork. As e-learning evolves this fall, research supports creating environments that offer a balance between challenge and motivation for students to [ease anxiety](#).

- **Return to school:** For children and teens with anxiety, returning to school after any holiday break can result in school refusal or increased anxiety, so a similar reaction can be expected once traditional school resumes. The most common reason for this is separation anxiety, but strong advocacy and support from parents and school representatives can be important components in the [transition back](#).

How can you help your child/teen manage pandemic-related anxiety? Here are five steps to mitigate and manage its severity:

1. **Be consistent.** Establish routines and schedules for consistency and a sense of normalcy, such as working on schoolwork during school hours, helping kids get exercise and time out of the house, and encouraging a healthy sleep schedule. School-aged children need 10-11 hours each night, while adolescents require 8-10 hours.
2. **Encourage social connection.** Help kids find ways to maintain social relationships, through social media, video calls and/or socially distant get-togethers.
3. **Create a supportive environment.** Spend more structured time together as a family. Schedule a game night or movie night, eat dinner together regularly, and create daily check-ins and space for kids to talk about

their feelings.

4. **Encourage new virtual experiences.** We are lucky to live in an era with so many online opportunities. From home, kids can tour museums and national parks, take classes (for learning and recreation), and keep in touch with their peers and extended family.
5. **Focus on the family and grow together.** This time offers a unique opportunity for families to become closer, and more time with caregivers can lead to increased social support. Mastering challenges can lead to personal growth, development and the ability to learn resilience for future challenges.

Parents should watch for significant changes in their child's functioning. If a child/teen is having difficulty completing schoolwork, isolating from friends and family, sleeping a lot more or less than usual, or having trouble managing emotions, further support may be needed.

[Linden Oaks Behavioral Health](#) has behavioral health professionals that specialize in identifying and treating adolescent anxiety. Our free behavioral health assessment will help determine if a child may benefit from weekly therapy or our Anxiety Program, a therapy-based day program. To connect with a certified therapist, please call 630-305-5027 and one of our assessment professionals will assist.

For updates on our planning and response efforts as we work to stop the spread of COVID-19, please check [EEHealth.org/coronavirus](https://eehealth.org/coronavirus).

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