

# Teen Mental Health During Pandemic

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The teenage years are naturally full of angst as children move through adolescence to adulthood. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the stresses of that transition for many youth. Pediatrician [Lauren Strelitz, MD](#), provides some advice on helping teens navigate this difficult time.

Dr. Strelitz is a pediatrician at [Bayside Medical Group – Pinole](#), and she has already noticed some concerns among her teenage patients. "Anxiety and depression in teenagers has been a huge problem, even prior to the pandemic, and is

getting worse," she explained.

Pediatrician Lauren Strelitz provides advice on helping teens navigate stresses during the pandemic in a full podcast.



The restrictions presented by the stay-at-home measures can make it hard for youth who long to test their independence. Being stuck at home and missing out on extracurricular activities can be tough. "While this is a challenging time for everybody, it is particularly difficult for adolescents," Dr. Strelitz said. "This is a time when they're developmentally supposed to be gaining independence."

Attending school remotely can require an adjustment. Connecting with peers and friends at school is an important part of development for teenagers. The virtual learning environment can be isolating in comparison.

"Finding creative ways to help your teenager spend time with

their friends is really important," Dr. Strelitz said.

She encourages parents to help their teen find ways to stay connected with friends. Making time to chat with schoolmates, or even to hang out in a socially distanced manner with one or two friends, is important for teens' well-being.

"It becomes a really big problem when the teenager is completely cut off from access to their friends," she said.

With virtual learning, screen time limits may seem like a thing of the past. However, Dr. Strelitz recommends that teens take regular breaks from the computer. "Staring at a screen for a prolonged period of time without a break is really not good for mental health," she said. "Everybody needs sunshine and fresh air."

Since there's no need for a commute to school, some kids may find themselves staying up later and sleeping in. But maintaining a regular sleep schedule can help teens stay healthy physically and mentally. "Sleep hygiene is another thing that's really important for kids' mental health," she said.

Spending a lot of time on the computer in a bedroom could be one culprit. According to Dr. Strelitz, creating a dedicated work space at a desk or table outside the bedroom can be helpful. Creating a mental space between schoolwork and

sleep space can help teens reclaim their sleep.

While stress and anxiety are common concerns for teens, Dr. Strelitz said, there are some clues that a teen may be dealing with a more serious issue:

- Being more irritable or easily annoyed than usual.
- Lashing out.
- Avoiding their friends.
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping enough.
- Overeating or not eating enough.
- Not enjoying things they usually like.

These are all potentially signs of depression. If you notice any of these red flags, it is probably time to check in with your child's pediatrician. He or she can help you and your teen find ways to manage and cope with depression.

"With mental health, normalization is really important so that people don't feel like they're being singled out," Dr. Strelitz said. "It is something that everyone is dealing with to some degree or another."

It's important to know that these feelings are common, and getting help is crucial.

"Therapists can help give kids and adults coping skills to deal with their feelings in a productive way," she said. "What will follow the child throughout their life is not getting help

and trying to deal with these problems later, once there's even more unhealthy coping mechanisms that they've internalized."

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