

WILLIAM ANNIN MIDDLE SCHOOL
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Dear Parents/Guardians,

February 5, 2020

This pandemic has been uniquely tough for pre-teens. This is the time in their development when they are wired for independence. But they have been cut off from their friends, and social activities and events that they have looked forward to have been changed or taken away entirely.

Many are feeling anxious and depressed - and a kind of grief.

Grief isn't just about death. It's about loss. Children face losses all the time. Family changes, moves, changes in schools are all losses. As are not making the team, not getting the grade you expected, not being included in an activity with friends, not going on a vacation you looked forward to. Loss hurts.

How can we help? These are suggestions from Drs. Kelly Maynes and Lauren Ayr-Volta, shared in ADDitude Magazine.

Give your pre-teen an opening to talk.

Many children avoid talking about difficult topics because the emotions attached to them seem too intense or overwhelming. But this can make them feel alone in what they are feeling, which adds to anxiety and depression. Parents can:

- Try asking about what they miss right now: sports and regular social activities, time with friends, vacations and travel, etc.
- You don't need to force a conversation, but you can create openings for when your child is ready.

Build in moments of connection every day.

With so much time together under one roof, you may think you've already got this covered. But family members can feel isolated and lonely even when they're in the same room together. And a sense of isolation can contribute to feeling depressed.

- Intentional quality time together can be one of the best ways to support your child right now.
- Instead of everyone being on their own device, pick a movie or show to watch together, so you can have the shared experience of laughing at the same humor or jumping at the same scary parts. Work on a puzzle. Cook a meal or bake a new cake recipe together. Have a family game night.
- Whether or not your child talks about their feelings, knowing they have family game night to look forward to, or even just a 15 minute lunch together, can ease their feelings of loneliness.

Talk about fear and maintain perspective.

The many unknowns ahead create anxiety for everyone. You or your child may feel on edge or stuck in “worst-case scenario” thinking. Children worry about family members getting sick, parents losing their jobs and not having enough money to do things they normally do, family members arguing, school pressures, etc.

- Talking through fears can release some of the stress attached to them. So ask your child what’s going on and talk through the details.
- It might help to talk about what is not in your child’s control and what is. Taking control of small but important things can provide security and confidence.
- If your child is stuck in “worst case scenarios”, urge them to consider the best scenario for a moment too. Talk about the many possibilities in between.

Normalize what your child is feeling.

Your child may be relieved to hear that what they’re experiencing is normal, and they don’t need to get over it right away. They may also feel some comfort in being reminded that they are not alone in their feelings.

- Share how you personally are experiencing the pandemic, without laying all of your problems on their shoulders. Talk about how lots of people are feeling sadness, anger, and grief right now.
- Ask how their friends are dealing with this, and what they’ve noticed other people saying on social media. Your child’s interactions on social media can be a great conversation starter and give you insights into their world.
- At the same time, be careful not to minimize your teen’s individual loss. Just because these feelings are normal and widespread doesn’t mean they’re easy.

Most importantly, make sure they know they can ask for help whenever they need it. Their school counselors are here for them and there are professional therapists who can help them too. Don’t hesitate to reach out to your school counselor for help in finding a therapist.

These are tough times. We can all benefit from support.

Please email your child’s counselor if you have particular concerns and/or if your child needs additional support.

The WAMS counseling department:

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