



Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic as a Teenager

by Melissa Beach

We are all up against challenging, and uncertain times during this 2020 pandemic. The coronavirus has impacted all of us in varying ways. Schools across the nation have switched to online school and most if not all have already announced that school will not return to be in session for the remainder of the school year. For most schools this will be about two and a half months of not being “in school.” Adolescents are managing so many different pieces in their world. The good news is there are ways to help them navigate such foreign terrain during these difficult times.

It is really important teenagers are aware that they will have to create a new normal for themselves, but that it will take some time to adjust. Varying ways to cope with this is by creating some semblance of a routine every day. This would mean to make an effort to wake up at the same time every day and get started on something that you know will boost your energy. Get some exercise, whether that be a safe social distancing workout that takes you outside or something indoors that you can follow. Maintain a healthy diet and sleep regimen. Get to bed at a reasonable hour and make it a habit to have the same bedtime and wake time daily, while getting a good amount of sleep.

It is very important to stay connected to your friends. Make time to chat through text, phone, or FaceTime every day if possible. Attend the school sessions established and keep up with the homework that you are assigned, for you are still accountable for your work as a student. If things are becoming overwhelming, reach out to a trusting adult or friend you can share and talk with about what you are feeling. Now is the time to do the hobbies you have always enjoyed—art, music, writing, dancing, and any other creative outlet you may have. This could also mean learning something new you have always been interested in exploring. Limit the time you spend reading or watching things that pertain to COVID-19.

For the teens that are stuck in home environments that are very stressful to tolerate or have become increasingly more stressful due to the consequences of the pandemic, such as financial struggles, death of family members, and other troubling things, the same coping strategies will be supportive. But even more helpful is leaning on resources offered in the community, such as online support groups, teletherapy, hotlines, and staying in contact with a trusted adult or friend. Remembering that you are not alone in all of this and that it is completely normal to be struggling in many different ways at this time as well as feeling a wide range of emotions. Try to gently allow these feelings to arise and be acknowledged. If it is in your practice to lean on religion or

spirituality, that will also be a support during these times. And lastly, do not forget your goals and dreams and your sense of purpose, because this crisis will eventually come to an end, even though it feels chaotic and uncertain now, but your future will continue.

Melissa Beach, MA, LMFT

Melissa is a Bereavement Counselor for HSB and has served for nearly three years in the Santa Barbara Unified school district seeing students at Dos Pueblos Highschool, Goleta Valley Jr. High, and La Cumbre Jr High. She has done outreach and support for additional schools that have experienced great loss, especially during the Thomas Fire Mudslide. In addition to serving in the schools for HSB, she has a part time private practice working with children, families, and adults.