

# HOW TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEAL WITH TOUGH TIMES

The effects of COVID-19 have impacted all of us. If you're a parent, guardian or a teacher, you're probably dealing with a tremendous amount of pressure while navigating the newly unpredictable landscape of life – which includes the wellbeing of the young people in your care. Look out for these five potential warning signs if you're wondering if a teen might be struggling to deal with our strange new reality.

## THE FATIGUE FACTOR

Changes in energy levels and sleeping patterns can be a tell-tale sign of stress. If a young person can't sleep or sleeps all the time, seems fatigued, disengaged or down or can't concentrate, it might be time to check in on them.

## MOOD SWINGS

A teen that doesn't seem like "themselves" and feels and acts irritable about or towards themselves and others. They can be down and defeatist, or weirdly upbeat and emotional, or even really angry and aggressive.

## SOCIAL ISOLATION

Staying in their room or away from others when they have their "own" time, avoiding friends and family, not connecting with friends online or on their mobiles, hiding away from "real" life and distancing themselves from family life.



## APPETITE CHANGES

Sudden decreases, increases or changes in appetite that seem entirely out of character could show that a young person feels their environment is out of control, and they're searching for something they can feel in control of.

## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Feeling tired all the time or complaining about constant headaches and stomach aches could be a sign that a young person is feeling under pressure and anxious. It shouldn't be ignored or trivialised.



## WHAT SHOULD I DO?

**First up, remember to take some time to work through your own feelings about what's happening. It's important that you find yourself in a good mental space, so that you can talk to the young people you are concerned about from a place of calm. You can do this by following the tips below – which are also effective tips to then use with a teen.**

- 1.** Write down what you're feeling and reflect on the "why".
- 2.** Share your thoughts with someone you trust.
- 3.** Take time for self-care: exercise, eat healthily and try to get enough sleep.
- 4.** Practise mindfulness: try to meditate, or practise deep-breathing exercises.
- 5.** Have serious conversations when you're in a calm headspace. Set a time and place for these conversations if you can.
- 6.** Combat fearful thoughts with practical facts: use information from trusted sources such as Healthdirect or the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- 7.** Try to cut down on the intake of news and media around COVID-19 to avoid increasing anxiety and fear – focus on the "now" and what is within your control, rather than on the uncertain future. You could also enforce a "no COVID-19 talk" time in your household, where you all focus on things that bring joy or productivity.

### HEADS' UP:

**Skillsroad aren't mental health experts, so we're giving advice based on what we've learned through the School of Life. If you have any concerns or questions, please seek help from a mental health/ medical professional. Don't try to deal on your own!**

**8.** Communicate openly and truthfully about what you're feeling and reassure your teen that they can talk to you, too.

**9.** Understand (and reassure young people) that it's okay to feel anxious, scared and upset right now – it's normal. But you (and they) are not alone in this – speak up and ask for help when needed. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness!

**10.** If you are feeling worried and overwhelmed, get extra help. The forums listed below all provide valuable support for both adults and young people.

### FIND HELP HERE:

- ReachOut: [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)
- ReachOut Parents One-on-one Support program: [www.parents.au/reachout.com/one-on-one-support](http://www.parents.au/reachout.com/one-on-one-support)
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- BeyondBlue: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

