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TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR TEEN DURING ISOLATION

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UNDERSTAND THEIR NEED FOR AUTONOMY. For teens, this developmental stage is all about creating a self outside of their relationship with their parents. Their motivation to get out from under your control is innate – they’re not trying to be difficult!

You can help by treating them like competent adults, not little kids. Ask them to contribute to the family in meaningful ways, such as preparing meals. Allow them to manage themselves – including their own school work – without micromanaging. Whenever possible, use noncontrolling, nondirective language, by asking questions (“What’s your plan today?”) instead of telling them what to do (“Here’s what’s going to happen today”).

SUPPORT THEIR NEED FOR CONNECTING WITH PEERS. This developmental stage demands social connection and belonging. Just because we are physically distancing doesn’t mean that our kids have to be emotionally isolated. Allow them to use whatever methods work for them to connect with friends. Yes, this might require a more flexible approach to their technology time, but connecting with friends is a lifesaver when your teen is stressed.

ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR FEELINGS AND BE EMPATHETIC. EMOTIONS ARE NEVER WRONG. During this stage, big feelings are likely happening, and they don’t always make sense – to you *or* to them. Something to remind them of is that feelings are like visitors, they come and they go. The goal is to communicate that all feelings are welcome, and that you’re there to provide an empathetic ear.

As parents, we tend to be problem solvers, and we want to swim our kids right through the big waves of emotions. But the truth is, it’s *okay* when we feel disappointment, sadness, anger. You can help your teen by acknowledging that all of this is **HARD**. Feelings of grief, anxiety, stress, and isolation are hard. But through it, what we learn is that **WE CAN DO HARD THINGS**.

HELP THEM PRIORITIZE WELLNESS. Good sleep habits, sticking to a routine, exercise, and emotional health need to be prioritized. Ask them, What are you doing for your physical health? Brain health? Health of their relationships?

TAKE BREAKS FROM SCREENS. Things like being outside, playing cards, and walking the dog are important to keeping our body and our mind active and healthy. Outside activities help regulate the day/night cycles that are important in resetting the brain.

VALUE FAMILY TIME. As weird as it sounds, this is an opportunity to strengthen our family relationships and get to know each other better. This looks different for every family, but if there's one shining spot to the stay-at-home order, it's that we have so much time with our kids right now!

HELP SOMEONE ELSE. Research suggests that helping others affects our happiness more than self-care. Even if their quarantine version of "community service" equates to helping a younger sibling on Khan Academy, that's something! The act of helping others allows us to see beyond ourselves and our own circumstances – and this is an important part of social maturity.