



HASSENFELD  
**CHILDREN'S  
HOSPITAL**  
AT NYU LANGONE

Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Educational Webinar at the Child Study Center

# How to Help Your Kids Handle Disappointment during COVID-19

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## Overview

Understanding your child or teen's experience of missing out during the coronavirus crisis

Tips on responding to disappointment and other emotions

Tools for effectively coping with loss of activities and social changes

Moving forward toward a "silver lining"  
(or something like it)

Prom.

Sports seasons.

Driver's ed.

Music performances.

Theater productions.

Birthday parties.

Graduation.

**CANCELED**

# Listen First.

(The Search for a “Silver Lining” Happens Later.)

- Allow your child time to process provides opportunities to work through any intense emotions.
- Extend an invitation to speak about the situation when they feel ready.
- Give them space to share their feelings and listen without passing judgment.
- Try not to interrupt or interject with alternative viewpoints.
- Avoid reassuring your teen that everything will be “okay,” or this is “fine” or, “not a big deal with everything else going on”.
- Instead, offer a calm presence and focus on being with them as they learn to manage overwhelming emotions.
- Instead, emphasize that you hear your child and express your support for how they’re handling it.

# Acknowledge that it's hard.

- It might be tempting to point out that missing one dance or baseball season isn't the end of the world.
- But for teens, those aren't just fun events.
- They're important milestones that they may have been looking forward to for months or years.
- Acknowledge that what they're going through is hard.
- Let them know it's OK to feel disappointment and to grieve.

# Validate.

- Avoid judging their reactions (by telling them it's not a big deal, for example).
- Express empathy and understanding for their feelings about missing out. For example:

*“I understand that this is really frustrating. It stinks to not get to do something that you’ve worked on or looked forward to for months/the entire year. This is a really hard thing to miss out on.”*
- Reassure them that even though we don’t know what the future holds, you’re proud of them for dealing with a challenging situation.

# Seek Solutions.

- Coming up with creative solutions in challenging times is a skill that can give your child a sense of control during the coronavirus pandemic:
- Contactless drop off of treats and goodie bags to friends/neighbors/anyone in need of cheer
- Zoom “ragers” -- virtual birthday parties, live commencement ceremonies (#showmeyourwalk)
- Drive by birthday party parades
- Living room prom or backyard family prom under the stars
- “Remember When” video compilations of sport seasons or senior year special moments

# Focus on others.

Help your child turn their focus from what they are NOT getting to what they can be GIVING.

- Search for Coronavirus Outreach Teams in your area on Facebook.
- Mail care packages to loved ones or hospitals.
- Offer to assist with groceries or errands for an elderly or immunocompromised member of your community.
- Reading children's books for a virtual storytelling program started by *Her Handshake*.
- Clean out your closets and donate.
- Share your talents.
- Donate your skills.
- Make teddy bears for children in need at *Teddies for Tragedies*.
- Make blankets for people (and animals) in need at Project Linus, Binky Patrol, and Cage Comforter.
- Become a virtual tutor.
- Fight cyberbullying through *Tweenangels* or *Teenangels*.
- *Chalk the Walk* Projects.

# Coping Ahead during COVID-19.

- Don't stew in negativity.
- Avoid anxious reactions by lowering stress.
- Put things in perspective.
- Write down your distress.
- Develop positive thinking muscles.
- Breathe your way to a clear mind.
- Problem Solve and Take Action.

# Disappointment is an opportunity to build resilience.

- Watching a child experience distress can be uncomfortable for parents.
- Youth who experience and learn how to handle disappointment and stress are much more capable of dealing with life's realities as they grow up.
- Allowing children to feel uncomfortable emotions, empathizing with them, and supporting them to move through those is the key to helping them develop into emotionally healthy and resilient adults.

# Attempt to be hopeful about the future.

- Gentle reminders for both parents and youth:
- Eventually life *will* get back to normal, and it's crucial to keep reminding yourself of that fact.
- Also, you're not the only one dealing with this right now; the entire country, and most of the world is, too.
- While you're in the thick of this experience, even when you're upset that you're missing out on certain things, it's crucial to still allow for moments of happiness.
- Give yourself to feel permission to feel joy and *laugh*.
- Cut yourself some slack. Acknowledge that this is a new situation (and far from normal).
- Encouraging basic self-care—exercising, getting enough sleep, and eating well—will help make you less vulnerable to how difficult it is to deal with all of this.

# More than just the COVID-19 Blues

While it's normal to be sad and stressed right now, be on the lookout for symptoms of depression or anxiety, such as:

- Anger or irritability.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Feeling tired or low energy.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- Significant changes to sleep or appetite.
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness.
- Loss of enjoyment of things they used to enjoy.
- Thinking or talking about death, suicide or self-harm.
- Unexplained pains, headaches or stomach problems.
- Lack of motivation to do things they're usually interested in.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering things or making decisions.

# Here to Help.

- There's a whole lot to deal with now, and it's OK to ask for help for anxiety and depression.
- Mental health professionals have the tools to help you figure these things out.
- Consider virtual visits and teletherapy with a therapist during social distancing.

# Take Aways.

- Youth are going through a grieving process.
- There will be times that they feel disappointed, angry, or sad, and that's OK.
- With time, they'll come to a place of acceptance.
- We can't force them to get there before they're ready, but we can help them find ways to cope.
- Coming up with creative solutions in challenging times is a skill that can give your child a sense of control.
- Learning to manage difficult feelings can help build resilience during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond.

“My experience is what I agree to attend to.”  
– William James, *Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1*

- “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.”
- - Gandolf, *The Lord of the Rings*

# Thank you

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