

Children and Illness: Helping Teens Ages 14 to 18 Years Old



Common Reactions of Teens

- Annoyance, resistance, frustration
- Feelings of invincibility – that can't happen to me!
- Discouragement, disillusionment and pessimism about being ill, possible changes
- Mood swings, irritability, anxiety, fatigue and isolation
- Anxiety about the future, concern about well-being of themselves and others
- Upset about missing events, school and friends
- Desire to help others, take action to support who may be ill

What to Say and Do

- ✓ Encourage expression of feelings about being ill or illness concerns. Listen to your teen. Allow for continuing discussion of how teen is feeling; make time to talk and provide reassurance.
- ✓ Discuss illness information or self-care with your teen. Assess how they feel, what they have heard and where they go to check the information they are receiving or following.
- ✓ Establish and maintain consistent routines that support teens as much as possible, such as family meals, normal bedtimes and waking times, access to school work or games with family members. Teens may also need time to connect with their friends. Social networks are very important to this age group.
- ✓ Develop a plan with teens for action if they or someone in the household becomes ill. This may include knowledge of contact information, healthcare resources to reach, awareness of first aid or simply planning next steps.
- ✓ When someone else is ill, involve teens in meaningful service activities that can be done safely. For example: recording family members' medication schedules for easy access in case they fall ill, picking up medicine or giving care to younger siblings or assisting them with their schoolwork.
- ✓ Encourage teens to do activities that relieve stress as much as possible. Include safe outdoor activities such as walking, yoga or stretching exercises, games, jokes, music and art.
- ✓ Slow down and help teens appreciate the positive things in life when they are feeling ill. Staying at home may be especially difficult for this age group, but following public health guidelines helps them and others.
- ✓ Share stories of family members or others in history who have shown resilience in the face of illness or adversity.

Sharing stories of people in history who have chosen to be resilient can encourage teens. Perhaps have them call family members and ask them about managing illness or difficult events they have encountered in their lives. The call will be "medicine" for the teen and the older family member.



For the complete publication, go to:

www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/talking-to-children-about-pandemics

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