

# How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus (COVID-19)

*5 strategies for teens facing a new (temporary) normal.*

By UNICEF

Being a teenager is difficult no matter what, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is making it even harder. With school closures and cancelled events, many teens are missing out on some of the biggest moments of their young lives – as well as everyday moments like chatting with friends and participating in class

## **1. Recognise that your anxiety is completely normal**

If school closures and alarming headlines are making you feel anxious, you are not the only one. In fact, that's how you're supposed to feel. "Psychologists have long recognized that anxiety is a normal and healthy function that alerts us to threats and helps us take measures to protect ourselves," says Dr. Damour. "Your anxiety is going to help you make the decisions that you need to be making right now – not spending time with other people or in large groups, washing your hands and not touching your face." Those feelings are helping to keep not only you safe, but others too. This is "also how we take care of members of our community. We think about the people around us, too."

## **2. Create distractions**

"What psychologists know is that when we are under chronically difficult conditions, it's very helpful to divide the problem into two categories: things I can do something about, and then things I can do nothing about," says Dr. Damour.

There is a lot that falls under that second category right now, and that's okay, but one thing that helps us to deal with that is creating distractions for ourselves. Dr. Damour suggests doing homework, watching a favourite movie or getting in bed with a novel as ways to seek relief and find balance in the day-to-day.

### **3. Find new ways to connect with your friends**

If you want to spend time with friends while you're practicing social distancing, social media is a great way to connect.

### **4. Focus on you**

Have you been wanting to learn how to do something new, start a new book or spend time practicing a musical instrument? Now is the time to do that. Focusing on yourself and finding ways to use your new-found time is a productive way to look after your mental health.

### **5. Feel your feelings**

Missing out on events with friends, hobbies, or sports matches is incredibly disappointing. "These are large-scale losses. They're really upsetting and rightly so to teenagers," says Dr. Damour. The best way to deal with this disappointment? Let yourself feel it. "When it comes to having a painful feeling, the only way out is through. Go ahead and be sad, and if you can let yourself be sad, you'll start to feel better faster."