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Know! Our Youth Are Beyond Stressed

It doesn't take an expert to see that as a whole, we are beyond STRESSED; our children are beyond stressed. What mental health professionals are telling us is that the COVID-19 pandemic has created circumstances unlike anything they have ever seen before.

Young people are missing their friends, their sports and other activities. They may be dealing with a parent's job loss or someone close to them getting sick. They may be in an unstable home where the tension has increased due to the crisis. Remote learning and other school changes also may be a factor causing great distress for our children.

In addition to headaches, digestive issues, interrupted sleep and a weakened immune system, chronically stressed-out teens may experience feelings of frustration, anger, anxiety and depression, which can lead to increased risk for self-harm.

For the first time in 20 years, we saw a 2.1% decrease in youth suicides in 2019, which translates to 833 fewer young lives lost. While national data on suicide is yet to be compiled for the pandemic time, those in the mental health field say the coronavirus is likely to have derailed that positive progress. Mental health advocacy groups have warned that some youth are at increased risk for suicide, including:

- African-American children, ages 5 to 12. (Learn more at withyouhere.org.)
- LGBTQ+ youth.
- Children with a current mental health disorder.
- Children with a substance use disorder.
- Family history of suicide.
- Children experiencing violence, including physical or sexual abuse.
- Children experiencing bullying.
- Firearms in the home.

During adolescence, young people tend to experience emotions more intensely, and often lack the ability to see beyond the challenge or difficulty they are up against. They need to hear from us, their

parents, their biggest influencers, that things will change; things will get better; tomorrow is another day.

For those youth who are struggling with mental health—in addition to reassuring them that better days are ahead—here are 10 steps we can take to protect and support them from Edward-Elmhurst Health at Healthy Driven:

1. Restrict access to dangerous or potentially life-threatening items in the home (firearms, knives, harmful substances).
2. Closely supervise teens with a history of suicide attempts or self-injuries.
3. Limit time spent alone to prevent opportunities to engage in self-harm.
4. Set limits on screen time and monitor your teen’s phone calls, texts and social media use for bullying or self-harm exposure.
5. Try to keep conflict at home low. Make sure your teen feels comfortable coming to you for help.
6. Frequently check in with your teen to see how they are feeling.
7. Ask your teen what their friends are saying. This can help you gauge their own thoughts.
8. Acknowledge the reality of the pandemic but reassure your teen that it’s temporary.
9. Help your teen understand that they aren’t alone and that life will get better.
10. Treat any talk of self-harm or suicide seriously. Call 911 or go to the emergency room if your teen cannot be kept safe in the home.

How we as parents and caregivers handle the hardships of this ongoing pandemic also plays a major role in influencing our children. If they witness us dealing with our own stress and challenges in positive ways, we will help to lay the groundwork for them to be able to do the same.

For further guidance and help, connect with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255** or visit **[SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)**. They provide free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Sources

[Bethany Ao, The Philadelphia Enquirer: Suicide rate decreased for the first time in a decade in 2019, CDC reports. Dec 2020.](#)

[Erica L. Green, New York Times: Surge of Student Suicides Pushes Las Vegas Schools to Reopen. Jan 2021.](#)

[Healthline: Psychological Stress. Feb 2019.](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health: Age-Related Racial Disparity in Suicide Rates Among U.S. Youth. May 2018.](#)

[Victoria Freier, MSN, RN-BC, Edward-Elmhurst Health – Healthy Driven: Teens at risk for suicide during the pandemic. Sept 2020.](#)

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