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## Know! To Thrive in Uncertain Times

We know that for many tweens and teens, their social connectedness is what drives them. When their social lives are not only disrupted but literally stopped in their tracks, it can have devastating consequences. At this point, the novelty of being out of school has likely worn off, and the reality of social distancing has set in. And while being six feet apart or hunkered down in our homes slows the spread of this virus, the physical and mental implications can include isolation and loneliness.

This ongoing isolation and loneliness can lead to **depression**, which can in turn lead to numerous adverse mental health and physical impacts, such as:

- Feelings of sadness, anxiety, and hopelessness
- Increased irritability
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Feelings of fatigue—even after plenty of sleep
- Trouble concentrating and completing assigned schoolwork
- Aches and pains for no apparent reason (headaches, stomachaches, cramps)
- New or increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Thoughts of self-harm, including suicide

Study after study shows the importance of social connectedness to one's physical and mental health. While experts typically encourage youth to put down the electronics and enjoy in-person interactions, these are unique circumstances. People of all ages are encouraged to grab their electronic gadgets to get and stay connected.

Tweens and teens are experts at connecting with friends on social media, by text, Facetime, or Skype, to name a few. But how about challenging them to get creative with their virtual connections. They could do a workout session with a group of friends via Google Hangout; come up with an exercise contest made up of burpees, push-ups and planks; jump rope together and see who can go the longest; or give group yoga a try.

If the weather cooperates, encourage your teen or tween to take it outside. They can remain at home or in their respective outdoor space to maintain appropriate social distance. This way they can get some fresh air, in addition to exercise and "facetime" with friends—three big components to their health and wellness.

They can also connect virtually to watch movies, create a healthy meal, or even go old school and simply just talk to each other.

Of course, too much time online is not a good thing either. There must be balance. This is where the silver lining to this current situation comes into play—the chance for families to slow down and spend more quality time together.

## **Family Support Is Key**

According to [Search Institute](#), there are **40 Developmental Assets** that contribute to a child's success in life. The first two assets listed are family support and positive family communication:

- **Family Support** = Family life provides high levels of love and support.
- **Positive Family Communication** = Young person and his or her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Try not to think of this extra time and togetherness as merely time to kill until we can all get back to our "normal" lives. Instead, consider this an opportunity to connect with each other and strengthen ties with your family. Try any one of these activities or make one of your own:

- Take a walk or a bike ride with your children
- Pop some popcorn and snuggle up on the couch to enjoy Netflix
- Get crafty
- Try a new recipe with your children
- Have a family game night—always fun
- Have everyone grab their favorite book and spend time relaxing together.

Mental Health America (MHA) typically references the statistic that 1 in 5 people will experience mental health issues at some point in their lifetimes. However, MHA President

and CEO Paul Gionfriddo says COVID-19 has turned our world upside down. Gionfriddo says that everyone—all five in five—is likely to experience worry, isolation, loneliness, and anxiety during this pandemic.

While positive connections with friends is hugely important in preventing feelings of isolation and loneliness during this time, a child's positive connection with their parent(s) is monumental. With all this in mind, we want to encourage our teens and tweens to maintain those positive connections with their friends. At the same time, we must take the lead to connect more with our children by engaging in activities with them, talking with them daily, and keeping up to date on how they are feeling about and dealing with their new "normal." It will go a long way for our children's successful development, health, and well-being both now and in the years to come.

## **Sources**

- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\), Katherine Ponte, BA, JD, MBA, CPRP: Coronavirus: Mental Health Coping Strategies. March 2020.](#)
- [Mental Health America: May is Mental Health Month: Tools to Thrive Outreach Toolkit.](#)
- [National Institute on Mental Health: Teen Depression.](#)
- [Recovery Centers of America: How Loneliness Fuels Addiction.](#)

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We created these free parent tips to empower parents like you. Know! helps you promote health and wellness and protect the young person in your life from unhealthy behaviors, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. However, we rely on donations from people like you to provide these tips. If you found this tip interesting or helpful, **[please consider donating at preventionactionalliance.org/donate.](#)**



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