

# Mental Health During COVID-19

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# Covid-19 Pandemic Check-in

- An opportunity for us to pause, check in with each other, reach out, and truly see & help one another
- Covid-19 has had profound effects on our lives - and we are/will be better for it
- My approach: we gather around those who are hurting and suffering the most; “triage” system; what is “pandemic ok”? (next slide)
- Thank you to the parents for doing all you can for your children and all of our children during these very challenging times - you are doing the best you can - and we are all struggling
- What we do as individuals really does affect society on a larger scale - and our children are watching and absorbing all of this (they will be better humans than we were at their age)

# Priorities During the Pandemic

Principles I use in my practice to make medical decisions & help families

1. **Physical health**: keep children safe and sound
  2. **Mental & emotional health**: make sure kids are doing ok at home
  3. **Academics & development**: after both the above are ok, I check in to see how they're doing in their learning
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# A Pediatrician's Observations During Covid-19

- Kids who seem to be doing better are those who...
  - Have a “good” set-up for school - “ambient” cues for learning; environmental cues that it’s time for school; computer and Wi-Fi that work ~6-8 weeks
  - Figured out a schedule/routine/rhythm - example of high school senior whose dad WOH daily ~2-3 mos
  - **\*\*Have a small peer support “in” group\*\*** - whether in school (also can be for hw questions), or outside of school ~ongoing
  - ...in addition to: higher SES, supportive and nurturing school environment (keen on IEP status, special needs, learning differences) and parents who are not under-resourced ~*seeing effects now (spring semester 2021) in those who are at risk*
- This year has been most arduous for incoming **6th graders, 9th graders, freshman starting college**
  - Already in non-pandemic years need time for transition (1-3 mos)
  - Especially those who were 100% remote from the get go
  - ..and are MLL, have IEP, learning differences, parents who do not speak or read English and/or are under-resourced, etc

# Statistics (2017 NIMH)

- 13.3% of adolescents aged 12-17 have depression
  - 20.0% of girls, 6.8% boys
  - Highest for kids who identify as 2 or more races
  - 70% of all kids with depression have severe impairment
- 31.9% of 12-17 yo have anxiety
  - 38% of girls, 26% of boys
  - 8.3% with severe impairment
- Relationship between depression, anxiety, & stress (“eustress”, allostatic stress, & distress)

[NIMH: Major Depression](#), [NIMH: Anxiety Disorder](#), [World Journal of Med Sci](#)

# Depression Screener: PHQ-9

<https://www.mdcalc.com/phq-9-patient-health-questionnaire-9>

More than 2 weeks of:

- Decreased interest level
- Feeling hopeless
- Sleep dysregulation
- Decreased energy level
- Appetite - too much or too low
- Feelings of failure
- Poor concentration
- Psychomotor retardation/Jitteriness
- **Suicidal ideation/thoughts**

# Adolescent Depression

## Neurobio model:

Prolonged exposure to stress → heightened stress response → too high stress hormone production → decreased brain neuroplasticity & hippocampal region (for learning/development)

Possible correlation to pubertal hormones

## My Observations: (very broad strokes)

Tweens-Early Teens (11-14/15yo) - concrete vs abstract thinking/emoting; need to learn how to express feelings

Older Teens (15-18+yo) - easier to engage; difference in boys vs girls; somaticizers vs emotionally aware

## Treatment:

- Referral to Pediatrician, Counselor, Therapist, Psychiatrist, who can help you:
- Explore your needs and determine priority
- Sleep is the anchor for mental wellness
- Going outside/exercise - check in low vs medium vs high energy levels and correlate activity type
- Ensure regular meals - no food = no energy
- Write down 5 things you can do by yourself that make you happy (endorphins, serotonin etc)
- Allowing extension in school work; understanding we won't compromise MH for academics

# Anxiety Screener: GAD-7

[https://www.mdcalc.com/gad-7-general-anxiety-di  
sorder-7](https://www.mdcalc.com/gad-7-general-anxiety-disorder-7)

- Feelings of nervousness
- Continued worrying
- Worrying about many different things
- Trouble relaxing
- Restless/antsy
- Irritability
- Sense of doom
  
- Sleep issues
- Panic attacks: acute onset of symptoms eg, palpitations, hyperventilation, dizziness, nausea, sweating etc.

How do we help?

- SLEEP regulation!!
- Stress (allostatic/situational) x Anxiety
- Sorting out what you can control vs what you can't
- Relaxation techniques: write down 5 things you can do yourself to help relax
- Breathing exercises
- Meditation: sitting, walking, exercising
- Exercise! Adrenaline (NE)
- “Troubleshooting” - practical solutions to address what brings on anxiety - it's a signal something is up (just outdated software)

# In Conclusion...

- Check in with your child - any technical difficulties (remote learning set up), rhythm/schedule balance issues, who is in their small group?
- “Triage” - are they doing *pandemic ok*? If not sure, check in with your pediatrician
- Fix now vs fix later?
- Depression and anxiety can co-exist!
- The stuff even our parents knew really does work: sleep regulation, consistent meal schedule, exercise etc
- Teach our kids about mental health: give them the language and methods (5 things) to help themselves and to know there is always help
- We are all in this together

# Final messages...

- We do what we can now - as long as we are still kickin', we can always make things up later!
- We celebrate the Ag lining: we get to spend (a ton) more time with our kids; they learn to explore areas they wouldn't have gotten the chance to otherwise; we have learned so much about ourselves and each other
- What does weathering through these times mean to you and your child?