

BACK TO SCHOOL



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“14-years-old, she/her, USA
I'm actually very excited to go back to school. I think I need to be socialized like I was pre-covid and it kinda surprised me with my anxiety but I just miss being around people. I miss being taught in person. I miss making connections with my teachers and I can't wait to be back there.

TIPS FOR AN "EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY" RETURN TO SCHOOL

Kanthi Raja

COVID19 has been no joke. In addition to the strain we all know, COVID19 has led to some unique challenges for adolescent girls. Unique challenges call for unique solutions so...here are some "tips" based on the preliminary research we have about the pandemic to guide teachers and school personnel, parents, and adolescent girls as we return to in-person learning.

More of the Same, but Worse...

The pandemic both worsened and introduced new challenges for adolescent girls. On the one hand, we see an exacerbation of pre-existing mood disorders including anxiety and depression, maladaptive social dynamics, disparities in education such as achievement gaps, lack of resources (staff, teachers), adverse childhood experiences, and differences in a return to in-person learning.

For teenage girls who typically feel marginalized, it's a return to a stressful environment where they once again experience marginalization. For Black and Latina females, this often represents a return to a racialized environment. It is normal for these teenagers to be hypervigilant.

And Some Unique Challenges...

The pandemic has inserted a new layer of "weirdness" into our lives. For adolescent girls, some of this weirdness involves things such as having to relearn how to socialize and communicate in person rather than via a screen, coming out of loneliness, managing stress around the politicization of COVID19.

Mental healthwise among adolescent girls we are seeing an increase in eating disorders and suicide attempts, the appearance of new symptoms of internalizing disorders, suicide attempts as pre-pandemic subclinical symptoms may have increased. Sleep problems have also increased for many. To top it off, we have many adolescent girls returning to school as they are actively grieving the losses of family and friends. Taking on new “parental” responsibilities may have been a part of their pandemic experiences, especially in families and communities where there may be a lack of help and resources. It may feel surreal for them to be back at school – a place they experienced with their loved ones safely at home.

So How Can We Support Adolescent Girls?

Listen and Hear their Voices

Perception

Each adolescent will have their own perspective. New studies that we have about the pandemic highlights the importance of things like perceived knowledge and perceived support on happiness and emotional well-being. Please respect their perceptions, and work to support and comfort in accordance with their perceptions instead of where they “should” be or “should” perceive themselves.

Some Things We Can Do...

- * Provide role models: Role models go a long way in teaching new ways of being and interacting with others.
- * Model things like adaptive communication. Even simple things like greeting each other, and prosocial conflict resolution. Remember, things that may have been “obvious” before may not be so obvious now.
- * Give adolescents the benefit of the doubt: actively engage them to see what’s going on before reaching conclusions. It may take more time to get at the truth.
- * Provide spaces for open communication with adult support. Five or fifteen minutes can make a big difference.
- * Validate, normalize, reassure and encourage. This may feel like it will last forever, but it will not. Keep going!
- * Provide accurate answers to questions, let their questions lead which pieces of information you share versus what you hold back. Give information at an age and developmentally appropriate level. And, it’s okay to say “I don’t know but I can try to figure it out.” Or, because it’s a pandemic it’s fine to say “we don’t know.”

If You Are an Adolescent Girl...

- * We see you, we hear you
- * Please reach out to a parent, teacher, neighbor, friend, helper if you want some extra support or if you are struggling.
- * If your friend is having a hard time...encourage them to reach out for support. If you are really worried about them, it’s fine to talk to an adult about them. Please remember you can try to help them find help, but YOU are not responsible for their well-being.

“ 15-years-old, she/her, USA

I’m sort of scared about what’s going to happen for my family. Cause I share a room with my little sister at home. I got my 2nd shot but like she doesn’t have hers. So like if she gets exposed, she basically has to stay home for 14 days I think. I just don’t want her to get behind and have to be home all by herself while I’m at school. It’s like I just want to keep thinking everything will be fine. And yeah just It’s hard cause I can’t ... I can’t protect [my sister] from covid like I could protect her from bullies and drama and other stuff.

RESEARCH REVIEW

Jennifer Poon

[Samji et al. \(2021\). Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth—a systematic review. *Child and adolescent mental health.*](#)

A recent article published in Child and Adolescent Mental Health in August 2021 investigated the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic among children and adolescents. This study was a systematic review of 116 previously published COVID-related studies presenting data on a total of almost 128,000 youth.

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The bad news? Symptoms of anxiety and depression increased during the COVID-19 pandemic relative to pre-pandemic estimates. Not surprisingly, many youth reported a high degree COVID-related fear. The most common COVID-19-related worry was fear of infecting either themselves or a vulnerable loved one. Other reported reasons for fear and concern during the COVID-19 pandemic included worrying about their ability to cope with their academic workload during the shift to remote learning, in addition to worries about the impact of COVID-19 on the school year and future plans.

Some groups were especially susceptible to negative mental health outcomes, including older adolescents and adolescent girls. Other high-risk groups included neurodivergent youth and those living with chronic medical conditions. Many studies reported the occurrence of negative emotions or mental health deterioration due to COVID-19 pandemic control measures, including decreased social contact due to concerns regarding spreading the virus. Overall, disconnection from friends, changes in routine, increased use of screen time, and isolation are all partly to blame for these reported decreases in teens' well-being.

The good news? A number of protective factors were identified that buffered against these negative health outcomes, including physical exercise (especially playing outside!), positive familial relationships, social support, and access to entertainment. Take home message? As we continue navigating the evolving nature of this pandemic, we suggest "coping ahead" by creating a consistent daily routine, going outside as much as possible, and maintaining strong social connections with friends and family members. And remember: It's OK to not be OK!

“11th-grade girl. Guatemala

The pandemic left me with many lessons, personal, family, and academic. The pandemic helped me learn and apply ethical values, including gratitude, respect, and patience. I will remember COVID-19 and the quarantine as an event in which many unexpected things arose, both for better and for worse. Full of new experiences, like distance learning.

“11th-grade girl. Guatemala

I learned to appreciate what really matters for me.

Relationships are way more worthy than possessing.



“18-years-old, she/her, USA

I honestly never believed anything was going to be fine again, like I'm pretty pessimistic about it. So this honestly hasn't been a huge surprise for me. But having to go to college and still having to live at home I think like the process of possibly not being able to do things again is really difficult. Because I don't have the security of being with my friends and stuff at school.

WHAT WE'RE INTO RIGHT NOW

*Film, TV, and book recommendations
about or for teens!*

Elise: **Sex Education** *Netflix*

Jill: **Simon Snow Series** *Rainbow Rowell*

Adeena: **Reservation Dogs** *Hulu*

Alexandria: **Push Out** *Monique Morris*

Jenny: **Never Have I Ever** *Netflix*

Kanthi: **Other Words for Home** *Jasmine Warga*

RESOURCE CORNER: MENSTRUAL CUPS

Adeena Black



School days can be hectic, and especially challenging if you happen to be bleeding. Menstrual cups may take some of the stress out of bleeding at school. Even if you have heard of a menstrual cup, you may be intimidated by the idea of buying and using one. How people who menstruate decide to manage our menses is a deeply personal choice, but here is some information for vagina owners:

- Menstrual cups and menstrual discs are as safe as tampons: they are no more likely to cause Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) and can be left in place for up to 12 hours, meaning they also tend to be less leaky, making them more reliable during long days at school, and at night.
- Menstrual cups are an eco-friendlier choice. Made of silicon, rubber, or latex, they last up to ten years, eliminating a lot of waste. No more running out of pads or tampons!
- Menstrual cups can save you money. Though it may seem like a lot of money to spend at once, a \$23 cup costs only 5% of what 10 years of buying pads or tampons would cost.
- Yes, they seem huge, but they actually match the size of a human vagina! And no, you can't really feel them once they're in there if inserted properly and sized correctly. Be sure to get the right size for you. If you find your cup uncomfortable, you may need a different size.
- Unlike pads or even tampons, cups take a bit of practice. If you're still put off by the idea of inserting one, [check out this video](#). And for further tips on fitting, going to the bathroom, and sex (if that's someplace you're at or planning on being some time), this video on ["Things No One Tells You About the Menstrual Cup"](#)
- Bleeding can bring up stigma. How do you experience it? Check out this [article](#) on menstrual cups from a Black perspective.
- Depending on your area you may be able to find menstrual cups at drug stores, grocery stores, or health food stores, though they may be hard to spot on the shelf. Big box stores carry them, and, of course, they are available online. They can range from as low as \$10 to as much as \$45. (As of this writing the June Mini is on sale for \$6 online.)

Using a cup can be a great way to get to know your body better, and reinforce the idea that it is your own. Menstrual cups may not be for everyone, but they may be a good choice for you or a vagina owner you love. It's entirely up to the owner of the vagina, but it's good to know all your options!

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