

MISCELLANEOUS

A Parent's Guide to
COVID-19

axis

“

Just a few weeks ago all this would have been unthinkable but, for now, it is the new normal.

[Paul O'Hare, BBC](#)

A Parent's Guide to **COVID-19**

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What in the world is going on?

Every part of our lives seems to have been upended. The respiratory illness that began as a relatively small outbreak in Wuhan, China has developed into a world-wide health crisis, and [COVID-19 has taken tens of thousands of lives](#) as nations across the world struggle to deal with over a million cases.

In an attempt to curb the infectious virus, governments have started to enforce [social distancing](#). International travel is closed off, schools are shut down, businesses have been halted, churches have moved online, and workers have been laid off or forced to work remotely. All of this has provoked [a social crisis](#): as long as the pandemic keeps us in our homes, bonds with friends and the outside world may weaken, and bonds inside will be tested from the added pressure and proximity.

Meanwhile, a financial crisis has been brewing. With [both supply and demand down](#) worldwide, the economy is starting to see some serious hurt. [Stocks are rising and falling at record paces](#), entire industries and small businesses have been pushed to the brink as social distancing has forced employees (and customers) to stay at home. Many families are now worrying about how to pay their bills without any source of income.

In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 has caused a health crisis, a social crisis, and a financial crisis: a three-pronged attack threatening every intimate aspect of our lives.

When will this end?

Across the globe, people are wondering: Is all of this really necessary? How long until I can go back to work? When will we be able to [get toilet paper](#) from the store?

Many of us don't yet feel the effects of the health crisis because we don't personally know anyone who has been infected, but we definitely feel the effects of the social and financial crises caused by the coronavirus. It's important to remember that these financial and social precautions are being taken in order to avoid greater health risks.

[Coronaviruses are any group of RNA viruses that cause disease](#). Most of the time, [these viruses only affect animals](#), but occasionally, like with COVID-19, these viruses can spread to humans and sometimes cause serious harm. [The coronavirus uses our cells](#)

[to replicate itself](#), and then spread itself to other humans either through surfaces we touch or direct interaction with other people.

While we don't know exactly how fast the virus spreads or how it might affect each individual, we do know that COVID-19 is fatal for some and hospitalizes many others. When it spreads too quickly, hospitals are overwhelmed, and people die unnecessarily.

Social distancing is not an antidote to COVID-19, [it simply slows down the outbreak](#), causing less people to get infected at once, and therefore causing less people to die due to an overwhelmed health care system. People call this [flattening the curve](#); the goal is to [prevent millions of deaths](#) and buy time to [develop an effective drug or vaccine](#).

Some say the pandemic isn't very contagious and that we shouldn't be worried about it, and some even say that [the coronavirus may not exist](#). [While all kinds of rumors fly](#), it is important to stay accurately informed, and experts like the CDC and WHO say that [the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions are most vulnerable to serious conditions, but that does not make young people invincible](#). As far as we know, washing our hands, not touching our faces, and social isolating are the [best practices to avoid infection](#), but we should keep up to date with the [CDC](#) and [WHO](#) during this time.

How are teens handling this?

Young people in particular are struggling with how to respond. The oldest of Gen Z are graduating college, but they won't get to walk across a stage to receive their diploma and many of them are heading home to quarantine with their parents. High school seniors won't get a chance to impress college recruiters at athletic events, and they will miss their shot at getting a much needed scholarship to attend college. Students won't get their driver's licenses, won't get to go to prom, won't get to celebrate their [quinceañera](#) or other rites of passage, and won't get to hang out with their friends.

There will be events and opportunities lost; some can be recovered later, but others can't. This is a lot to process, and is extremely frustrating to young people who desire to prove themselves and connect with others. We cannot pretend to compensate for these losses, but we can listen and grieve with them. These are huge losses for many teens, and we should not approach them with a "that's life" attitude which invalidates their emotions.

Because of these losses, and because COVID-19 is less fatal for those aged 30 and under, [young people are having a difficult time accepting the guidelines they are given](#). It's only natural that our teens want to get out and be social; some of them even want to break the rules.

Despite the challenges, and despite the fact that they are less vulnerable, our teens still need to be safe. It's developmentally normal for them to [feel like nothing can harm them](#), so they need to be taught how to respond. They can still carry COVID-19, and still spread it to others even if they don't show symptoms. We must be diligent to protect our family, and to protect others.

As parents, it is our role to empathize with our teens, but it is also our role to lay down guidelines. [Young people are not invincible](#). If we can help them to [see the significance of their actions](#) within the bigger picture, and help them to see [quarantining as an act of generosity and self-sacrifice](#), we may be able to help them accept their limitations and participate in physical distancing.

Why do these things happen?

As Christians, we have to come to grips with the fact that we live in a broken world. We may wonder, and our teens may wonder, "Why is all this happening? Why would God allow this?"

We live in a sinful world, a world that is devastated by the long-lasting effects of [the Fall](#), a world with illnesses and death. Since the beginning, we have tried to cover up our sin, [but we cannot outrun the effects of the Fall through technology and science](#), and we cannot save ourselves.

The truth is, there are many things in life that we cannot control. Though we try, we cannot prevent illnesses or disease, and we cannot control death. God is God, and we are not. But [God is not overwhelmed](#), and He is not surprised by anything that happens, including this coronavirus.

This [does not mean we will not suffer or grieve](#), nor does it mean we will understand or enjoy everything that happens to us in our lives. As Christians, [it is not our place to provide an answer for the coronavirus](#); instead, as N.T. Wright puts it, our place is to recover the lost art of [lament](#).

And yet, we have an everlasting hope. While we lament, we should also display our faith to the world and to our children who are watching closely. If we spend all of our time watching the news and worrying about the things we cannot control, we will never escape our [anxiety](#). When our teens come to us with questions about illness or death, we don't need to act like we have all the answers, but we can help them to understand why we don't fear death.

In an age where people feared the imminent threat of an atomic bomb, [C.S. Lewis](#) [said](#), "If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things." In a time where we find ourselves threatened by health, social, and financial crises, let us spend our time doing what we can—praying, teaching, reading, working from home, playing games, cooking, mowing the lawn, washing the dishes—and not worrying about the things we cannot do.

Stuck at home? Now what?

Whether or not we want to be at home, many of us are, and it's changing our lives. While we may feel anxious, bored, and frustrated, our teens still long for a sense of purpose, connection, and structure, and they need us.

As parents, we may desire to spend this time [smothering](#) our teens with affection, or we may want to deadbolt them inside of their rooms so we don't have to see them anymore. The truth is, our families need time together, and time alone. We need to practice flexibility and adaptability, and develop a balanced schedule of work, school, exercise, and play.

Society has taught us that we have to stay busy to have purpose: normal isn't good enough, we must be extraordinary to stand out. Even our teens feel pressure to secure their future, do well in school, and be active on social media. In her book [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#), Tish Warren writes, "I often want to skip the boring, daily stuff to get to the thrill of an edgy faith. But it's in the dailiness of the Christian faith—the making the bed, the doing the dishes, the praying for our enemies, the reading the Bible, the quiet, the small—that God's transformation takes root and grows."

While we never wanted the pandemic to happen, it does provide an opportunity for all of us to pause. If [God commands us to rest](#), then we should take advantage of this time

as a family and as individuals to reflect and rejuvenate in our homes. We should also use this time to connect, learn about one another, and grow together.

Unfortunately, we don't know exactly how long all of this is going to last. There are many things we can't control, but there are things we can take responsibility for. So here's the question: Are we going to let the coming days, weeks, or months waste away? Or, are we going to take advantage of the extra time we have? It's not enough to simply hope for a better future, we must take action if we want to see change in our family. As the old adage goes, if we don't make a plan, we plan to fail.

One of the most practical things we can do is talk as a family about what we want to do. What plans can we make? What goals can we set? What do we want our days to look like? We shouldn't just tell our kids what to do, we should also get their opinion, and we should consider their advice so that everyone in the family has a sense of purpose.

What if things are going really badly?

During this time of quarantine, teens are more likely than usual to be angry, anxious, and bored. We want to partner with our teens during this time and give them as much agency as possible, but we also need to ensure that healthy boundaries are put in place to protect them.

It's quite likely that our teens are angry at what's happening to their lives. They may be angry at God, angry at the coronavirus, or just [angry in general](#). We need to listen to them and validate their frustrations, whether they communicate directly with words or indirectly in other ways.

They are angry that they can't play sports, perform in the musical, or visit their friends, but if we help them to [understand the scope of the virus](#) and [hear the stories](#) of those who are affected, they may develop a greater sense of empathy and understanding, and we may be able to help them accept what is going on and let go of some of their frustration and anger.

[Gen Z is already an anxious generation](#), but the coronavirus is only making teens more stressed. [Like 9/11](#), the coronavirus may leave an enduring mark on the American psyche and become a source of stress that [shapes generations to come](#). It is important for us as parents to model calmness and security where we can, and not freak out over

things we cannot control. This doesn't mean we should closet all of our emotions or be unrealistic: just as we need to give grace to our teens, we should also have grace for ourselves when we feel overwhelmed.

It's not an easy time to deal with mental health issues, but there are still [resources available](#). If our teen needs counseling, we should [find a counselor](#) that can do Telehealth sessions. If they are depressed, we should see if we can get the right medicine and [work with their diet, exercise, and sleep](#) to help stabilize some of their emotions. We need to know the signs of [depression and suicide](#), so that we can step in quickly if needed and protect our kids from self-harm.

Because of the changes thrust upon us, we're all susceptible to over-consuming media and using technology as a form of escape, but our teens are especially vulnerable. Many of our teens already struggle with compulsive online behavior, whether with social media, gaming, or bingeing TV shows. Smartphones and [video games](#) are [designed to be addictive](#), and social media and streaming sites ruthlessly [compete for our attention](#).

More than anything, we need to pay attention to what our kids are doing online. Under normal circumstances, teens spend [9 hours a day](#) using media, and many teens [look at porn on a weekly basis](#). Now, [the porn industry is exploiting our circumstances](#), offering free premium services, and [porn usage is going up](#). If our kids haven't already been exposed to porn, there is a higher chance they will be exposed to it during this time. Setting up [internet filters](#), establishing [social media boundaries](#), and providing [media time limits](#) can protect our teens from unhealthy habits and unwanted exposure.

A hard reality is that [porn addictions](#) will only worsen during this time if we do nothing to address the root issues and establish good rhythms. We need to help our teens [address these issues](#), but we need to make sure we do so in a way that doesn't accidentally make the problem worse. It can be very hard to accept these challenges, and really awkward to address this topic, but there are [good resources](#) available, and ways that we can [become more educated](#) in fighting the issue.

Despite everything going on, now is actually a good time to address bad habits, whether it's a porn problem, drug addiction, or something else all-together. With love, patience, and prayer-guided wisdom, we should humbly and courageously seek to love and guide our children towards holy and healthy lifestyles.

How can I help my kids thrive?

Our kids aren't perfect, and neither are we. We need to have grace and patience for ourselves and for them, or our families will get trapped in cycles of bitterness. To help our teens grow, we need to grow ourselves and [practice self-care first](#). One of the best ways we can help our teens is to be an example, to live out the life we want for them. If we model Christ-like behavior in humility, our teens learn just by observing.

As our kids get older, they long for and need a greater sense of responsibility and ownership. We need to be [willing to let our kids fail as they grow](#), or they won't be ready for adulthood. We should have open conversations with them to guide them in appropriate amounts of responsibility, while also giving them time and space alone to think, play, grow, learn, and develop into their own person.

Gen Z desires to be independent and self-sustaining, and during times like these, they want to learn the life skills they actually need to be secure for times of trouble. With so much free time, our teens may actually be grateful if we teach them [how to cook](#), [budget](#), [invest in a Roth-IRA](#), [file taxes](#), [change the oil](#), do laundry, and work on [time management](#) skills.

Learning these skills gives our teens something to accomplish during their time of boredom at home, provides us an opportunity to connect, and sets them up to thrive in the future. While these life skills are important, we should also encourage them to create some of their own goals and help them accomplish these, whether it's perfecting an instrument, [practicing a new language](#), learning to [code](#), or [starting a youtube channel](#).

As we build trust, we open up the space to [converse about what really matters in life](#). We all long for a sense of purpose, and times like these can provide an opportunity to really think about redefining ourselves and our priorities, and search for what we love and are passionate about.

As our teens attempt to make sense of the world of which they live in, and the world that is to come, we can help them navigate a path of happiness, holiness, and hope.

Do I need to become my kid's teacher?

Quarantine may provide a good opportunity for our kids to learn other life skills, but they still need to continue with their formal education, as it is an essential part of childhood development. Learning helps teens to grow more independent, [develop cognitive and reasoning skills](#), and practice time management. It's also an essential part of [being successful](#) in the 21st century, so as best as we're able, we should make sure our kids don't fall too far behind in school during this time.

Normally, the school day provides teens with a sense of routine and structure. Since school is now online, one of the most important things we can do as parents is provide this sense of [routine and structure from home](#).

Just as we need private space in the house to focus on our jobs, our kids also need a place where they can study. We may need to reorganize the living room, set up temporary workspaces, and have family conversations about how to share the house. We also need to help our teens create a [daily routine](#), so they know what to expect each morning when they wake up.

As much as we are able, we should seek to serve our kids as they adjust to schooling from home. We didn't ask for this pandemic, but neither did they.

As parents, we can't change what's happening for them, but we can invest in their future. We don't need to teach a math class or stress our kids out with extra assignments ([schools are already doing their best to adjust](#)) but we should make sure our teens get the supplies they need, do their homework, and attend class on time.

Our school teachers and principals may have specific suggestions that we should follow, and we can talk with other parents online to share ideas. If they are interested, our teens can also use this time to [prepare for SAT tests](#), [take free college classes online](#), make a [Linkedin profile](#), build a [resume](#), or study for a [CLEP](#) exam, which can help high school seniors save money and get ahead on general education courses in college.

What about my kid's social life?

Some of us may feel out of place right now, but for students who are accustomed to seeing their peers and friends nearly every day of the week, this time in quarantine is especially jarring. [Teens are not meant to be socially isolated](#), but since physical distancing is a requirement for most of us, they are trying to find other ways to connect with their friends and entertain themselves. As they struggle to cope with what's going on, we may wonder if it is our role to befriend them.

While it is good for us to enjoy our family and have fun with our teens, it's important to remember that we are the parents. No one else can claim that role in our kids' lives. It is our responsibility to take care of them, protect them, train them, and discipline them. It's not wrong to be friends with our teens, but if while connecting with our teen we lose our roles as parents, then something has gone wrong.

We should [create space for our families](#) to play games, watch movies, cook meals together, or make TikTok videos, but we should also create space for them to connect with their own friends. Under normal circumstances, our teens can connect with their friends in many ways, but during quarantine, their ability to interact with others is strictly limited to digital communication.

If possible, we might consider temporarily increasing our data plan, upgrading our internet service speed, or downloading [video chat apps](#). We should also consider nuancing our regular media boundaries and look into new [video games](#) or [digital board games](#) for them to play online. Family conversations about everyone's needs should guide our decisions and give each person the opportunity to share what's important and most helpful for them.

While we want them to be able to socialize with their friends, we can't ignore the dangers that come with using technology. We still need to teach our teens how to navigate the digital world and discuss how much time we should spend online and offline while we are quarantined.

These are new circumstances for all of us. Though not ideal, we need to do what we can to provide our teens with a sense of belonging and friendship. We must continue to educate ourselves, be creative, and partner with schools, churches, and other parents to help our kids connect with the communities they have been physically isolated from.

Final thoughts

We began this year believing [2020 was our year](#), but now... [not so much](#). There's no denying it, the coronavirus is making life difficult for everyone, and we are all being tested in new ways. Things will go back to normal eventually, but [normal might not be what it was before](#). Families will have lost loved ones, businesses will struggle to pick up the pieces, young people will have missed important milestones, and we will all have to work together to move forward.

It can be daunting to get through each day, and overwhelming to think about the future, but we must choose to bring all of our hurt, pain, grief, and frustration before our heavenly Father. He has proven himself throughout history, and [the Bible shows us how to both lament and praise God](#) during times of trouble. [God is trustworthy](#), even when we are confused, hurt, or doubtful.

Even though we can't go to church services or interact with other Christians the way we normally would, we all still have access to God. No matter how much we have to separate ourselves from others, He will never separate Himself from us. [God is present](#), and we can still glorify Him and worship Him in these unusual circumstances. During these testing times, we can prove ourselves faithful to God while blessing our neighbors and our families.

Though it looks different now, we can still serve our communities and the rest of our world. We can attend church services digitally and give online. We can donate extra food to food pantries or [medical supplies to hospitals](#). We can call the elderly and play games online with those living by themselves. We can pray for and support our local, state, national, and international leaders.

More than anything, we can still [serve our families](#). We might not be able to stop the coronavirus, but we can do our best to create a home environment where everyone can thrive. Not everything will go as planned, and we need to have grace for ourselves and our children while we try to adjust to this new normal; all we can do is make the most of what we've been given.

This pandemic may have caught us by surprise, but we should still [take advantage](#) of this time to love one another, grow together, and start conversations that will last for a lifetime.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [Anxiety Conversation Kit](#)
- [34 Tips for Coronavirus Quarantine](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Suicide and Self-Harm](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Pornography](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Rest](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Social Media](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to College Prep](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Video Games](#)
- [10-Day Teen Talk on Drugs](#)
- Check out [axis.org](#) for even more resources!
- If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low yearly or monthly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass!](#)

Additional Resources

- [American Association of Christian Counselors](#)
- “[Communion During Coronavirus](#),” John Dyer
- [Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life](#), Tish Harrison Warren
- [From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology](#), John Dyer

Additional COVID-19 Resources

For accurate and up-to-date information, please visit the WHO and CDC websites.

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Watch:

- [The Coronavirus Explained and What You Should Do](#)
- [Simulating a Pandemic](#)
- [Coronavirus and How Numbers Work](#)
- [Coronavirus in a Migrant Camp](#), BBC
- [Coronavirus Migration in India](#), BBC

Read:

- [“How The Pandemic Will End,”](#) *The Atlantic*
- [“Young People are Not Immune,”](#) *The Atlantic*
- [“Recovering From the Coronavirus,”](#) *BBC*
- [“Talking to Younger Children about Covid-19,”](#) AACAP
- [“Convincing Teens to Quarantine,”](#) *NPR*
- [“Convincing Elders to Quarantine,”](#) *Vox*

Listen:

- [“What coronavirus is Like For a Doctor in Italy,”](#) *The New York Times*
- [“My Husband Has Coronavirus,”](#) *The New York Times*

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A Parent's Guide to **COVID-19**

Recap

- COVID-19 has caused health, social, and financial crises that change our daily lives, but we can go to God with our hurt and confusion.
- We live in a broken world with illness and disease, but we don't need to be afraid of death or overwhelmed by things we can't control.
- Teens are frustrated, anxious, and lonely because of how their lives have changed, and there may be increased depression, anxiety, and addiction.
- We can use this as an opportunity to rest and think about what matters in life while establishing healthy rhythms.
- We can take advantage of our extra time to learn new skills and play games.
- We don't need to homeschool our kids by adding extra assignments or trying to teach a new class, but we can support them as they school from home.
- We should try to have fun with our family, but we should also help them connect with their friends in creative ways and provide a sense of community.
- God is still at work, and we can honor Him by blessing our families, neighbors, and the world we live in.
- We can take advantage of this time to create lifelong conversations!

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!

A Parent's Guide to **COVID-19**

Discussion Questions

- Do you understand what COVID-19 is and how it spreads?
- How do we flatten the curve and why is social distancing important for us to participate in?
- How has your life changed because of the coronavirus?
- Do the health, social, and financial crises make you afraid?
- How does being at home make you feel?
- What do you need right now to do well in school?
- If you were in charge of scheduling your day, what would you do?
- What goals can we set as a family?
- What life skills would you like to learn?
- What are some ways you can connect with your friends?
- What is something you've wanted to try, but haven't had time for?
- What is one way we can bless somebody else?
- How do you see God at work during all of this?

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!