

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AT HOME

The start of a new school year can be an exciting yet uncertain time for the whole family. Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, many kids are facing mental health challenges right now. In fact, 82% of 11-17-year-olds who took a screen at mhascreening.org from March 2020-July 2021 were showing signs of a mental health condition.

If you are concerned about your child or teen's ability to readjust to in-person school and have a good year, there are things you can do at home to set them up for success and support them during this transition. Not only is the home environment the most significant factor affecting academic achievement, family member interactions help provide social and intellectual development and improve child confidence.¹

Even if your child or teen seems to be doing well, they were impacted in some way by the events of the last year and a half. All school-age youth experienced some degree of:

- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Loss of normalcy or disruption of routine
- Reduced peer interaction or loneliness
- Lack of structure
- Grief or loss

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH

Children and teens pick up on anxiety and tension in adults around them. Be open about your own feelings and lead by example in how you deal with them by modeling healthy behaviors and coping skills.

REEVALUATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND ANTICIPATE CHALLENGES

Children and teens may act differently in school than they have before because of the adjustments they had to make last year to adapt to virtual learning. Anticipate some disorganization, forgetfulness, and anxiety. They may also have higher levels of irritability and frustration than you're used to. Patience and compassion are key.

WORK AS A TEAM WITH THE SCHOOL

Teachers and parents/caregivers should work together for the best outcomes, especially since students may act differently at home and in the classroom. Be familiar with options for supports available through your child's school to help accommodate them if they are struggling emotionally or academically. You are your child's best advocate!

ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY

Trust is important. Your child needs to know they can come to you and that you'll really listen when they do. Be curious and ask questions about your child's day, what they learned, how they felt, etc. – especially since adolescents usually aren't the most forthcoming. For those who are dealing with lots of fear and anxiety, they may require frequent comforting and reassurance to feel safe.

KNOW WHEN YOUR CHILD'S STRUGGLES MAY BE A SIGN OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Common signs of mental health conditions in youth include problems with concentration and memory, changes in appetite, feeling sad or hopeless, loss of interest in things they used to enjoy, excessive worry, irritability, changes in sleep patterns, and/or angry outbursts. Check out our fact sheet, Know the Signs: Recognizing Mental Health Concerns in Kids and Teens, for more information.

A Parent Screen is available at [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to help you determine if your child or teen may be having emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties. These results can be used to start a conversation with your family doctor or a school mental health professional.

[MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) | [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL](https://mhanational.org/back-school)

¹Khan, F.N., Begum, M., Imad, M. (2019). Relationship between Students' Home Environment and their Academic Achievement at Secondary School Level. *Pakistan Journal of Distance and Online Learning*, 5(2), 223-234. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1266643.pdf>