

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

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Helping Youth During COVID-19 Holidays

Handling the stress and mental health effects during a global pandemic is hard for a person at any age, let alone a child. Don't forget to monitor how children are handling the disappointment and potential changes to routine holiday traditions due to COVID-19. These can lead to feelings of sadness, despair, anger, anxiety and stress. It is important as adults we take time to acknowledge these feelings and talk through them. Listen to them and let them know you care. You don't have to have all the answers; just assure them you are there to help them through this difficult time.

The 4-H youth development program has always and continues to build a firm foundation for youth that encourages good decision-making and strong interpersonal skills. Social-emotional health is the cornerstone to confident, caring young leaders who understand how to take care of themselves both mentally and physically. The Search Institute's research has demonstrated that when young people experience developmental relationships with caring adults their outcomes are better, their risk behaviors are lower, and they are more likely to be on the path to thrive in life. The [Search Institute](https://www.search-institute.org/) has created a checklist with strategies for relationship-building steps during COVID-19. While the list was intended mostly for staff in schools and youth development professionals, they apply to all adults, even parents.

- Express care. Show youth they matter to you.
 - This could be as simple as telling them you believe in them and you know they will get through this difficult time.
- Challenge growth. Push youth to keep getting better.
 - An example includes asking the youth what they are or could be doing to help others during this time.
- Provide support. Help youth complete tasks and achieve goals.
 - Ask how they are feeling about the world, themselves and the future during this time. Indicate that you really hear them when they respond and that you care about their feelings.
- Share power: Treat youth with respect and give them a say.
 - When you can, offer choices rather than mandating a single option.
- Expand possibilities: Connect youth to people and places that broaden their world.
 - Explore through the Web or social media how young people very different from them around the country or even the world is experiencing COVID-19.

In summary, take time to listen and recognize how youth are feeling. Take this time to creatively and collaboratively brainstorm new alternatives or traditions for the 2020 Holiday season. Take time to practice gratitude and find ways to express gratitude to those less fortunate such as writing a note to someone who might need extra joy in their life. Be kind to yourself and each other.

Source: Search Institute, <https://www.search-institute.org/>