

“Creating a Routine in Changing Times”

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With virtual-learning, social distancing, and a long list of cancelled beloved pastimes, life can feel pretty far from what we once knew. Change is hard. Yet, amidst a time of uncertainty and change we are searching to find a new normal. A sense of stability, routine, and familiarity are important for youth. Parents, care-providers, and youth development professionals can help youth plan their day to reestablish routine. Having a daily routine enables youth to have some control and choice in their life which is important for their well-being.

Consider the following as you develop daily or weekly plans:

- Engage youth in planning a routine together. Adults and youth may have differing ideas about ways to spend time, start by having a conversation about what expectations you have. In the beginning of your planning determine what activities that are non-negotiable. Be clear about the expectations that need to be met. If possible, offer some choice for when these “must happen” activities can occur.
- Find a healthy balance between flexibility and consistency when establishing routine. Creating plans that are too ambitious or rigid will be difficult for youth and for caring adults in their lives to monitor.
- Maintain self-care routines. Regularity with hygiene practices, diet, sleep, and exercise will set adults and youth up for success.
- Stay focused on what youth value. During times of change, it might be tempting for youth to abandon goals that were important to them. Take this opportunity to talk about why persistence toward goals is important.
- Create a balanced routine that includes time for unstructured activity and FUN! We all need a healthy amount of free-time, so don’t overschedule the day. Be aware of the amount of screen time a plan includes. For free time, consider non-screen activities like playing outside, reading a book for enjoyment, drawing, family game night, cooking, or other hands-on activities.
- Focus on what youth can control. During periods of change there so many things that can’t be controlled. Help youth focus on what they CAN do as opposed to what they can’t. This can be an opportunity for youth to explore an interest they haven’t had time for in the past and invest in learning something new.
- Stay connected. Successful routines should include intentional ways to keep young people connected to the important people in their lives. Staying connected to those we care about helps manage anxiety and challenges that times of change can create.
- Practice gratitude. Change can present feelings of loss and it is important to acknowledge and address those feelings. At the same time, change can be an opportunity to talk about gratitude. Challenge youth to explore what they are thankful for and look for ways to express that gratitude.

Experiencing change and finding a new normal can be hard. While creating new plans won’t solve all of the challenges associated with change, planning can be a positive way to help young people respond to the uncertainty of the situation by establishing a flexible routine.

More information and resources about youth social-emotional development in difficult times can be found at <https://disaster.unl.edu/families> or by contacting your local county Nebraska Extension office.