

It's happening again. The Covid case numbers are rising, the weather is turning colder, cold enough that we are more apt to stay indoors, the days are shorter, dark comes sooner and many of us are finding ourselves feeling disconnected again and isolated in our homes. The difference between now and April is it's colder AND it's holiday time.

The holidays are a time when we are typically gathering with friends and family. It's a month of celebrations, gatherings, warmth, joy. For many of our students Thanksgiving was the first holiday they spent in a small group of only those living in their own home.

Teens thrive on social connectedness. These are the years when they build friendships that sometimes hold as much weight as their familial relationships. It is important this winter that we maintain connection, that we do what we can to encourage our children to see and talk to their friends (in a safe way) to support their mental well-being. And, it's important that we do that for ourselves as well!

I shared these two articles last spring that have tips and ideas for helping your teen manage the distance blues: [8 Ways to Help Teens Cope With Social Distancing Blues](#) and [Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis](#). While I believe that connecting our children with their friends is important, I also believe connecting at home, as a family, can make a huge difference in our emotional well-being. After all, our family is who we are spending the majority of our time with.

Here are some thoughts I have about connecting as a family:

- Get to know your kid! Really listen to them when they share with you, don't try so hard to make it a teachable moment or have a rebuttal, but ask questions about what interests them and pay attention when they answer. The more you listen, the more they will talk.
- Accept them for who they are! Letting them know they are one-of-a-kind, unique, and valuable to the world just the way they are (not when they raise their grades or complete their homework) communicates that no matter what kind of mistakes they make, they still have you to come cuddle up with.
- Practice empathy! Try to understand how your teen is feeling. Feeling understood increases connection.
- Create belonging! Kids need to belong. Look for interests where your family can all bring something to the table, or something everyone enjoys, and make a point to do them often. You could have a weekly movie night, or Sunday picnics. My family sampled different ice cream shops each week over the summer. It was fun!

- Stay positive! Comment on the positive, hold your tongue on the negative until a later time, give hugs, hugs and more hugs. Let them know however they are feeling, it's okay.

If there is one thing being in a pandemic has taught me, it's that the most important thing is your connection with your immediate family. Harmony in the house promotes positive feelings and resilience to get through the difficult times.

These are some upcoming workshops and community groups:

- PEP hosts [Defusing Power Struggles During A Pandemic](#) - Wednesday, **December 10th** at 8:00pm.
- PEP has a number of pre-recorded workshops geared directly at the current times called the [Coronavirus Programs](#). Also timely, [Motivating the Unmotivated Teen in COVID Times](#) and [White Parents, Let's Talk: Doing Our Part to End Racism](#).
- Caring Matters Virtual Family Nights on Zoom - workshops to help families learn coping tools, plan for handling celebrations and mark the absences of a loved one. Families will need a space where they can do art together (materials will be delivered) and a device to access Zoom. [Registration is required](#). The next family nights are **December 10th**.
- Las Noches Familiares de Caring Matters son talleres que ayudan a las familias a que adquieran herramientas de afrontamiento, planifiquen como manejar las celebraciones, y como marcar la ausencia de su ser querido de una manera significativa. Por medio de la elaboración de proyectos de arte, y facilitadas por voluntarios entrenados, se anima a los padres e hijos a crear juntos un proyecto, como una manera de continuar conversaciones a cerca de sus seres queridos y ayudar a mantener sus recuerdos vivos. Para obtener más información visite nuestra página [caringmatters.org/family-nights](http://caringmatters.org/family-nights)
- The next MCPS Let's Talk Careers is scheduled for Wednesday, **December 16th** from 10:00-11:30am with Government Leaders: Cheryl Kagan, Lily Qi, Marc Elrich and Sidney Katz. You can watch on [MCPS-TV](#) or [MCPS online](#).
- Stressed Teens is beginning a new 4-week virtual Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction group for teens aged 13-19 (and mature 12 year olds). Improve focus, manage stress and chill-out! Four Tuesday nights from 7:00-8:30pm starting January 26th. [Learn more here](#).







