



## **Notes from “Providence Presents: Mental and Spiritual Health in a Time of Corporate Crisis”**

*These are notes taken during a live webinar with Westmont professor and psychologist Dr. Andrea Gurney, Free Methodist Church’s Rev. Doug Ranck, and Providence Bible teacher Max Beers, moderated by Providence’s Director of Spiritual Life, Susan Isaac. If you would like to watch the webinar recording, please visit Providence’s [Remote Learning](#) page on the school website.*

### **Tips for combating anxiety/depression/emotional distress with your teen/your family:**

- Remember that teens are not the same as young children, but they are also not the same as adults. Teenagers have the ability to think about things the same way adults do, but their prefrontal cortexes are not yet fully formed so they suffer from an “invincibility complex” and aren’t thinking about things with the same awareness that adults may. It may be harder for them to process certain parts of this because they understand so much but don’t have the same impulse control.
- Be aware of how you are processing this as a family. The experiences of kids and youth are often lost in the shuffle as parents work to keep the family afloat. Commit to finding balance and caring for each other.
- Don’t wait until you or your teen is in crisis to start addressing this. Start the conversation even if it doesn’t seem urgent.
- It is imperative to maintain healthy and regular physical habits: good sleep, hygiene, nutrition, and exercise.
- Both kids and adults need to monitor media consumption. Put a time limit on your intake of news and social limit. Excessive media consumption directly correlates to an increase in PTSD symptoms, to the same levels as first responders experience after an event.
- Make space to name and process “ambiguous loss,” which includes loss of events in addition to people and jobs and finances. Don’t automatically go to the positives (e.g. “but at least we have clean water/a home to live in/a job”). Acknowledge the loss or anticipated loss and allow your children and yourselves to grieve.
- Play is important! Find ways to incorporate art, music, creativity, and fun into your regular routine.
- The practice of lament is also important. It’s a spiritual discipline to enter into lament with God. Not complaining or whining, but making space to share worry and sadness with God and with our trusted circle of friends.



- Recognize the stages of grief and watch for them, even in regards to anticipatory grief (“I can still go to summer camp, right?” “Why can’t I just see my one friend?”). And don’t underestimate the power of the last two stages: acceptance and meaning-making. Don’t let grief end in a sense of hopelessness.
- Anxiety is normal, but we need to move away from unproductive anxiety to productive anxiety. We can do this by naming what makes us anxious, getting specific about the roots of what makes us anxious, and developing an action plan (e.g. praying, reaching out to a friend, discussing as a family, etc.). Doing something about your anxiety is important--action binds anxiety.
- Remember that this is just a season. It’s hard because we don’t know how long it will last, but it will end at some point. Think about and celebrate the things in life that aren’t canceled.
- Your pastors, youth leaders, teachers, administrators, counselors, etc. are still here for you. We are all in these fields because we want to help. Don’t be afraid to reach out and ask if you or your teen are struggling.

### **Tips for connecting with teens during this time:**

- Be clear and honest about the history of the relationship. Don’t be afraid to acknowledge and apologize for former shortcomings or tensions: “I know things haven’t been easy leading up to this and now we’re all stuck in a small space.” Once you acknowledge these difficulties, engage in problem solving and forgiveness with them.
- Use “we” language. Let them know you are there and available.
- Be honest about your own struggles, your own prayers. Invite your children into prayer with you.
- Teens are naturally defensive. Try to avoid “why” questions; instead, use the behavior of your teen as your language. Rather than asking “Why are you in a bad mood?”, try something like “I noticed you weren’t making eye contact during dinner. Can we talk about what you’re thinking?”
- Be aware of what brings your kids joy, and be careful not to assume that what helps you feel better is what helps them as well.
- Intentionally engage with what your teenager wants. Give them something to look forward to.
- If you say you want to be present, commit to being present. When your teen does open up or want to talk, don’t allow yourself to be distracted at that time. Your child will pick up on that and assume you don’t actually want to be present for them.
- Quantity develops quality. Leave space for the quality moments to happen; eat meals together, take walks together, watch movies together. Keep your expectations low as you begin to build or rebuild this connection; you can’t expect you and your kids to connect and share all your feelings right away.



- It's so important for your kids to know that your love for them is unconditional love. Watch your responses; if you ask for honesty and they give it to you, try to avoid jumping to "fixing" or "solving." Start with listening.
- Don't compare your family dynamic to another, and don't compare your relationship with one child to your relationship with the other. What works for one person won't necessarily work for someone else. Take the time to discover what works for your unique family and its unique members.
- Be creative about how to spend time together. Play tag. Create games. Do Zoom parties. Invite your kids into the process of deciding what to do as a family, and give them some autonomy in it from time to time.
- Don't give up if it doesn't work the first few times; relationships take trust, and trust takes time. Take a step back, reflect, pray, and try again.

### **Tips for setting limits on screen time:**

- Set the limits as a family. Involve teens in that conversation, allowing them to offer their ideas about their own schedule.
- Having kids read some of the research on teens and media consumption can be helpful.
- Let your teens plan family activities that don't involve screens, and get excited about what excited them. Show enthusiasm for what you're doing together as a family.
- Consider adopting a 2-1 ratio. For every hour of screen time, require 2 hours of non-screen time. (Not including screen time required for school.)
- Don't allow a child's trauma response to be a screen. Develop practices that engrain in a child's brain that their trauma response should be to turn to their parents and God, rather than to a screen. Demonstrate this in your own life and trauma response.

### **Further Resources:**

Family Service Agency: [Information on mental health services during Covid-19](#)

Family Service Agency: [Parent coaching](#)

["Naming Loss and Gratitude with Young People"](#) by the Fuller Youth Institute

["That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief"](#) by Scott Berinato

[NT Wright's "Five Things to Know about Lament"](#)

["Breath Hope: Eleven Tips to Promote Mental and Relational Health during Covid-19"](#) by Dr. Andrea Gurney