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Subject: Feeling lost? Tips for managing the post-pandemic identity crisis

The pandemic has changed every one of us. We are all a little different today compared to 2020. And even if we are better for those changes — more conscious, less entitled, perhaps kinder — we will likely each find ourselves facing some difficult questions. If I don't like the same things, am I still the same person? When old activities lose their thrill, what do I enjoy doing now?

1. Identity and relationships are fundamentally changing

At the moment, adult identity is under question - **we are all questioning who we are and who we want to be**. There are also many small changes in our preferences that collectively create identity shifts. For instance, we may no longer want to dress up in fancy clothes, go to big parties, or attend big sporting events. We may have found our circle of friends has grown smaller as we question which relationships feel important. Or we want a different structure at work, allowing us more time with family.



2. Why is this important for parents of teenagers?

Teenagers are fully immersed in creating an identity to carry into their adult lives. **Teens search for personal validation outwardly and explore external confirmation through their image, status or who they hang out with.** Yet the external world is shifting and what were once important markers of aspiration seem not to exist, like working abroad or taking a gap year. **They look to adults for guidance and mentoring.** And if personal changes are not yet integrated, **adults may struggle to lead their teenagers right now.**

This can leave teenagers feeling extremely vulnerable. They may feel they don't have the solid support they need for their changing identity and needs, as their parents are going through a transition of their own and are often operating just in survival mode.

3. The impact of lockdown on teen identity

At various levels of lockdown, teenagers spent more time online and at home, unable to compete in sports or in the classroom. They were blocked from socializing or flirting freely. **Teenagers need connection, freedom, and exploration.** Now, these activities can feel monitored and restricted. How will this change your teenager? How will this impact identity formation?

As psychologists, the answer to these questions is still uncertain. **Recent surveys reveal increased loneliness and sadness on the one hand, and anxiety/anger on the other.** We also know that introverted teen personalities are coping better than extroverts. Parents need to know how to manage and guide this. What to do?



4. What you can do to help your teenager

- Understand that teenagers are extremely frustrated by the restrictions on their life. This causes emotional stress.
- Lead by example. **Embrace anti-fragility!** Know that we grow and learn through adversity, and character is strengthened through struggle. Feel your vulnerability and find the courage to act bravely. The human spirit is immense.
- Have an open discussion at home about the ways you feel different. Ask every family member to share how they have changed- emotionally and practically.
- Focus on what you CAN do right now. For instance, can you find fun activities to do together, or make time to improve communication. What CAN'T be changed? What feelings or ideas do you need to let go of? What things do you need to just accept? **Parents can lead the way on this giving teens tools to cope during this personal and global transition. Tools that include acknowledging feelings, thinking or talking through the causes and learning self-regulation by calming the nervous system down.**
- **We need to share stories of how we have coped with adversity in the past!** We should share what worked and how we got through it. We need to fully commit to

wellness and mental health hacks like laughing, talking, and sharing as well as meditation, exercise, and healthy eating.

This is such an awesome opportunity to commit to new 'selves' who are creative, inventive, courageous and above all, gentle on the inside. At times like these, it is fine for an adult to say to a teen 'We are in this together and we will work it out.' Or "it's all going to be ok.' Be kind and reassuring. Fake it to make it if you have to!

In closing, I will share a Zen Buddhist parable. The monk told a sorrowful girl that a yellow flower was dipped in gold - this stopped her crying. The meaning? **It is okay, and even encouraged, to believe in magic possibilities when times are tough.**

RESILIENCE FOR TEENS

I discovered an incredible resilience course for teens with my friends and life coaches Jess and Matt. Teenagers benefit immensely from tools for establishing resilience, and I believe this program has immense benefit for your teen during these tough years.

<https://flourishresilience.com/ultimate-resilience-for-teens/> (Button: Flourish Resilience – Learn more)

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS COURSE

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