

Cut down on social media, volunteer, maintain a gratitude journal: Ways to overcome mental turbulence in youth

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Just when we thought it was all coming to an end, the pandemic hit us harder and anxiety and stress came back at full force. It is historically proven that youngsters are at a greater disadvantage during economic downturns and the global pandemic is once again proving this correct. A global survey on youth and COVID-19 conducted by ILO (International Labour Organisation) aimed to capture the effects of the pandemic on the lives of young people (aged 18–29). Over 12,000 responses were received from 112 countries. The study found that half of the world's youth population is subject to anxiety or depression-causing circumstances and more than a third are uncertain of their future career prospects due to Covid-19. It has been particularly hard on young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries.

For youngsters, COVID-19 has disrupted several aspects of their lives and more and more young adults are battling depression. We find out about the impact of the pandemic on the youth and list some coping strategies to help them stay resilient on the road to recovery

Dealing with the loss of loved ones

Many youngsters have seen their parents as well as relatives going through Covid and this has impacted them in a big way. "I recently lost my grandma to Covid-19 and my parents have been unwell too. Daily visits to the hospital has taken a toll on my mental health. I find myself perpetually worried and thinking about the health of my family members. I have been trying to exercise or read for a few minutes every day only to distract my mind," says student Manasvi Shah. Moreover many youngsters aren't comfortable with solitude and isolation. "There is gloom everywhere and many aren't capable of processing any news related to death. Hence, many teens and young adults are having brain fog, insomnia, low self esteem, lack of motivation and constant tiredness. Many who have suffered from Covid themselves are also not feeling better mentally even after having recovered. This is because quarantine and loneliness has taken a toll on them," says clinical psychologist Dr Seema Hingorrany.

Find creative ways to deal with career stagnation

According to the study, young people whose education or work was either disrupted or had stopped completely were almost twice as likely to be affected by anxiety or depression as compared to those who continued to be employed or whose education was not affected.

"I have been getting many calls from youngsters with complaints of anxiety, ruminating thoughts, low-mood, depression and emotional disturbances. Many started a new job in 2020 and 2021; they were all offered internships and exciting jobs. However, due to the lockdown, many corporates downsized their staff and they weren't needed any more. Many teens wanted to go abroad for their further studies and their plans didn't materialize. Their dreams are shattered and this is causing them a lot of mental trauma," says clinical psychologist Dr Seema Hingorrany. Unable to experience their academic or work life in normal ways is leading to young adults being constantly worried about their future.

Yes, there is a lot of uncertainty, fear and negativity around, but every problem has a solution. "While the job market has busted, one can take this opportunity to learn to become self employed and work out of their home. A lot of people feel limited by the skill sets they have today but they can certainly invest more time in developing new skill sets. That wouldn't require them to be hired by someone. They can get into trading, stock markets, creative occupations, consultancy etc. If you feel clueless, look for a good mentor who can give you valuable advice. It's the time to manufacture opportunities yourself," says relationship counsellor Dr Aman Bhonsle.

Social life is declining but society isn't

With the second wave of Covid-19, teenagers and young adults have been, yet again, forced to be removed from their normal social, physical and educational interactions. This has moved them away from social interactions and in turn led them to nothing but an extremely high usage of social media and phones. Research has shown 56 per cent teens are using social media while 43 per cent are hooked to online gaming almost every day. "Teenagers and youngsters are feeling more and more lonely. They are not getting the peer support and interaction they are used to which is, in turn, impacting their overall brain and self-development," says Pooja Khera, Coach of Happiness, and Wellbeing. For many teens and youngsters, friends are like family. "They are missing simple pleasures like meeting with their group of friends in a garden or going for a drive at night. Zoom calls and virtual parties don't excite them anymore," says Hingorrany.

In such a situation, one must innovate opportunities to interact where ideas and excitement can be shared. Meet like-minded people and make new friends in the virtual world. "Express your emotions to your friends and family. If you wish to cry, cry it out. Suppressing your emotions will only increase your anxiety. Spend time playing board

games with loved ones. Avoid engaging in arguments and conflicts with your family. This isn't the right time for it," says millennial author Shahzeen Shivdasani.

Staying active, volunteering has its benefits

Staying active and occupied is a great way to save yourself from fears and negativity. "Avoid watching news on television or social media all the time. Instead, indulge in a new activity. Read all the books you always wanted to read, learn zumba online or join a baking class. Yoga really helps to connect mind, body and spirit," suggests Hingorrany.

They say, help others in order to help yourself. It's so true! "Due to the ongoing pandemic, I have a lot of time on hand. Earlier, I'd spend most of my time watching the television or feeling upset about the current situation. However, during this second phase, my friends and I formed a little group as we too wanted to do our bit for people suffering from Covid-19 and their families. Whether it's taking care of their pet for a few days, providing meals to Covid patients and their families or looking for beds and medication, we try to help them in whatever ways we can. Making a positive impact on the lives of people is giving me joy and a certain sense of achievement," says professional Hardik Modi.

Indeed, volunteering is a great way of being part of a community and can help one regain confidence.

QUICK COPING STRATEGIES

1. Limit your news consumption but keep yourself well informed
2. Take care of your physical health and immune system. Consult a dietician for the required intake of Vitamin D, B 12 and magnesium. Cut down sugar and flour. You are what you eat
3. Avoid watching news constantly
4. Maintain a gratitude journal
5. Have 3 litres of water every day
6. Make sure to include a physical activity in your daily routine. Movement produces happy hormones
3. Create a regular sleep schedule

EXPERT SPEAK

"We are currently in war times and we don't know when the war will end. So, it's important to understand that the courage that you find difficult to discover today will serve you beautifully in your future. The pandemic will teach you valuable life lessons. If you see yourself as a survivor, you can tell a very inspiring story to the future generations. The mindset shift is required."

- *Aman Bhonsle*