

Quaran-Teens: The Next Generation of Mental Health Patients

How Social Isolation Leads to Mental Health Issues and Substance Use



Would anyone a year ago have imagined the world we live in at this moment? Other than a few disease and disaster experts, most of us had absolutely no idea how easily society could be so drastically altered by a microscopic virus known as COVID-19. Would anyone a year ago have predicted that there would be a whole new generation of teenage mental health and addiction patients? Generation Z is in trouble, and the healthcare industry needs to be prepared.

There's a two-fold danger to teens presented by the pandemic. Many teens were already at risk of suffering depression and addiction problems due to issues like an unstable or dangerous home environment. Pre-quarantine, these teens are already likely to be in danger. Now, factor in increased isolation and a greater probability for domestic abuse, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Even more troubling is the fact that quarantine conditions put unlikely teens at risk for depression and addiction. These are those Gen-Zers who may never have been at risk from such issues had the pandemic never happened.

At Foothills at Red Oak Recovery, we recognize the mental health challenges that COVID-19 has presented to the nation's teens. At our adolescent treatment center, we've also started to work with the teens who have felt the impact of COVID-19. In addition, we have begun the process of informing the general public about these dangers.

Missing Out On All Of Your Major Life Events

The teens of today may be remembered in the future as the lost generation. Unlike the previous lost generation of the late 1910s and early 1920s, this generation is shaped not by a world war but by nature itself. Today's teens face a difficult future. Unlike any American generation in the last 75 years, they are literally being deprived of their youth.

What has COVID-19 taken from teens? That list is frighteningly long. From birthday parties to first loves, playing high school sports to taking vacations, Generation Z is missing out on huge portions of their lives.

Take high school graduation, for example. With graduation comes several rites of passage for teens. There are the farewells, the parties and of course the graduation ceremony itself. None of this happened in 2020. Many high school seniors graduated to no fanfare and to no audience. Other than a few farewells through FaceTime or Instagram, their classmates basically just disappeared from their lives suddenly in mid-March. All of the normal socialization associated with graduation never happened for the class of 2020. The effects of this loss may vary. For highly adaptable, confident, and well-adjusted Gen-Zers, the pandemic has been just another of life's hurdles to get over. For other types of teens, it's been a quiet disaster.

What happens to young people when all of the norms they're supposed to experience don't happen? What happens when they realize they've been cheated of rewarding life experiences everyone else before them has had? The class of 2020, and teenagers in general, have been deprived of coming-of-age events. As a result, Gen-Zers will react to the pandemic differently than older people. To teens, the pandemic has robbed them of precious, once-in-a-lifetime experiences that they can never get back.

For teens, there's only one graduation ceremony from high school. Because of the quarantine, they will never experience it—ever. Many parents tried to help them deal with the situation by placing banners on their homes congratulating their graduates. This was a kind, well-meaning gesture, and it will certainly help many teens deal with a difficult situation. However, other teens won't be so lucky.

Some Gen-Zers are bound to ask themselves, "What's happening to all the things that make life worth living?" The answers, in some cases, aren't encouraging. This phenomenon has obviously not gone unnoticed by mental health professionals. A professor of clinical psychology referencing the pandemic recently said the following, "Grief is defined as the emotional response to loss. Loss is anything you were planning on, hoping for, had invested in. And to have that taken away from you—that is loss. A lot of our kids are grieving whether they know that's what they are doing or not."

There's a lot to unpack from that statement and a lot to worry about. Clearly, there are many teens out there who are feeling disconnected and lonely. As they try to navigate an extremely unfamiliar existence, they are uncertain, fearful, and dreading what the future may bring. Teenage life was already difficult before the coronavirus came along. With this bleak new reality, is it any wonder that teens are hit particularly hard by the consequences?

The Deadly Combination of Teen Angst, Boredom, Disappointment, and Failed Expectations

The coronavirus and the resulting quarantines have been terrible (both economically and socially) in a thousand little ways and more than a few big ones. It brought everything from inconvenience to major upheaval, depending on one's circumstances.

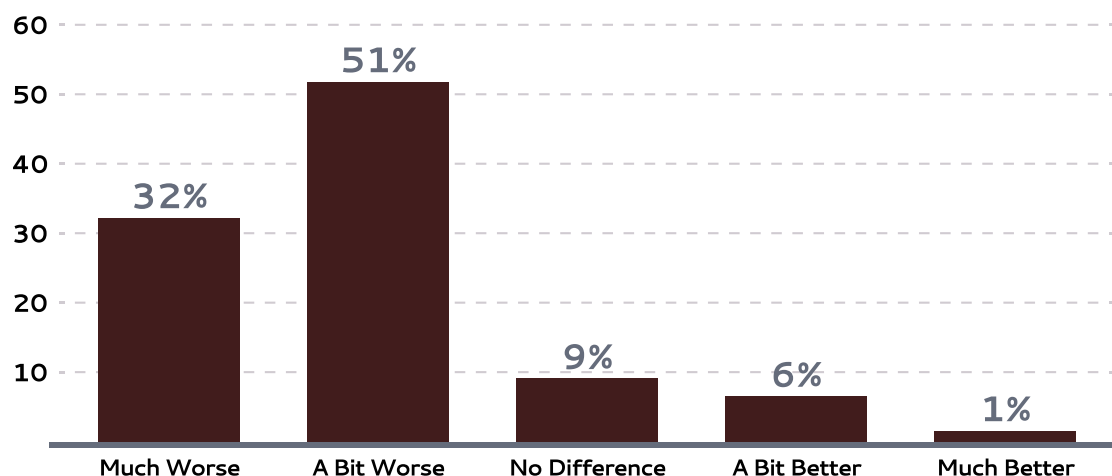
Most adults have observed the pandemic in terms of whether they remain employed, whether they can go to a restaurant or a ballgame, and if it's safe to go to the beach. For seniors, the pandemic is scary, sure, but they've faced many difficulties over the years and have the ability to deal with it better than most younger people. The picture for teens in the pandemic is utterly unique and alarming.

One almost insurmountable problem for teens is that they can't see any light at the end of the tunnel. With fewer pressing responsibilities than adults, teens tend to be a bit insulated from the world. They don't have mortgages or full-time jobs to pressure them and slow them down. Therefore, they can do things like hanging out with friends simply because they have the time to do it. But that was then. *This is now.*

As quarantines were imposed across the country, teens wound up spending months connecting with friends almost entirely through their smartphones. Genuine human connection, like what people feel when they are face to face with others, has been lost. Here's another question: what if high school and college don't come back? Or stay back? It's proven unwise to make predictions about when coronavirus rates increase or decrease. Clearly, there are no guarantees about the continuing operation of colleges in the short term (or long term, for that matter). Even for those colleges and universities attempting to operate normally, there's no way to be sure they won't

close down again if corona cases begin to soar among students, faculty, and staff in the future. If students become locked into a virtual classroom existence, the dangers of isolation and a lack of socialization don't bode well for many teens. As anyone in the healthcare field knows, isolation and a lack of socialization are fuel for mental health and addiction issues.

Distribution of the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the public health measures on young people's mental health in the United Kingdom (UK) as of March 2020



Source: United Kingdom; SurveyGizmo; March 20 to March 24, 2020; 2,111 respondents; 13-25 years; Young people who had ever received mental health support; Online survey

COVID-19 and the Need for Smart Mental Health Treatment

Even after the coronavirus comes under control through a vaccine or treatment or both, its effects on Gen-Z mental health will linger long afterward. With some teens, the consequences may play out for many years. For others, the dangerous consequences of quarantine are simply added to an already difficult daily living situation. Clearly, the effects are already starting to be felt. Our mental health and addiction treatment center has seen upticks in teen admissions for alcohol and drug addiction. There's no doubt that the need is there and growing. Consequently, Foothills at Red Oak Recovery is doing everything possible to reach prospective teen patients.

Bringing Teens Into Treatment

Although detox and drug rehab facilities stand ready to help teens suffering from addiction that has been exacerbated by quarantine conditions, seeking help is more problematic than usual. The

unique situation of millions of people under lockdown has made many people, teens included, anxious about being outside of the home. Even if Gen-Zers realize that they may be descending into addiction, they may be more hesitant than ever to pursue treatment. Getting people to pursue addiction treatment has never been easy. For many individuals, there's a social stigma about addiction treatment that can keep them from getting help. Then, on top of this situation comes the quarantine! As the news blares warnings about social gatherings and infection rates, many people's excursions from home have been to grocery stores, banks and gas stations, and little else (often because little else is open). A situation has been created where the learned behaviors of quarantine will linger even after the danger has passed. People will return to regular activities slowly and cautiously. For some, the return to addiction treatment centers will be slow as well. To help get prospective (and relapsed) teen patients into detox and treatment facilities, we must accomplish two important things:

- 1. Be clear that these facilities are safe to reopen because the number of virus cases has either flattened or declined in the county where a facility is located.**
- 2. State unequivocally that reopening is only occurring because a facility has taken the necessary precautions necessary for patient and staff safety.**

These messages are solutions to concerns that prospective addiction treatment patients have in a COVID world. Announcing these solutions will encourage your teen to take steps towards recovery.

Connecting With Teens About Addiction Using Our Social Media Presence

Overcoming obstacles to addiction treatment has always been a challenge for our treatment center. In the aftermath of a pandemic, this is more problematic than ever. Consequently, treatment centers need to turn to other methods of reaching teens.

The truth is that we can't reach teens on "our" media. We have to reach them on theirs. Naturally, we're talking about social media here. Teens expect to find everything they need or want on social media. In this environment, we need to connect with teens in a way they understand and relate to.

Therefore, we provide posts that are helpful, supportive, and informative, where a sense of trust grows. As with clients of any age, teens would need to know four things primarily:

- **Do I have a substance use problem?**
- **Am I endangering my health with substances?**
- **Will treatment really help me?**
- **Where should I go to get help?**

We can explore each of these issues on social media in real-time with real people in two-way exchanges that benefit everyone reading the posts. Unlike the one-way information dispersal nature of traditional media, social media allows for reactions, clarifications, and realizations. For teens who may be suffering from substance use for the first time, our social media presence may be the only thing that can get through to them that, yes, they do need help.

Extending an Invitation for Treatment in the Midst of a Pandemic

Teens, especially teens suffering from mental health issues and substance use, don't need any extra fuel for feeling anxious. Therefore, it's prudent to create a welcoming atmosphere at our treatment facility. Unfortunately, this has become more of a challenge since the arrival of the pandemic. To help alleviate any anxiety that teens (and parents) may have, we use social media to:

- **Get patients ready for any changes that our facility has had to make as a result of COVID-19.**
- **Reinforce why changes have occurred. At all times, addiction treatment facilities need to highlight their dedication to client safety.**
- **Ensure that our staff understands why we've made these changes: The information teens see online and what they get in-person complement each other at Foothills. For example, what if a staff member has nothing more to say to clients about physical alterations and protocol changes to the facility beyond, "Oh, I know, it's annoying"? Clearly, this doesn't help clients. The concern and compassion we show on social media are delivered in person by our staff members. Therefore, our staff would respond, "Yes, we realize some changes are inconvenient. However, our primary concern is that you're safe while you're here."**

We want the teens in our community to know that they are safe and they don't have to worry about the unexpected. Once they're in our treatment program, we can focus on what's important: helping them recover from their mental health condition and substance use.

We're Prepared for the Increase in Teen Depression & Addiction Fueled by Quarantine

Even under the best of circumstances, it's easy for teens to be overwhelmed by the negative consequences of COVID-19 and quarantines. Teens look to adults for guidance in these strange times. Unfortunately, the adults are often as confused as the teens.

When the coronavirus arrived, American society had no experience dealing with a pandemic. For most of us, there was no pandemic guidebook on hand to consult, so all of the business closings and furloughing of employees sent shock waves through society. Norms were overturned, seemingly overnight.

At Foothills at Red Oak Recovery, we've weathered this storm and come out stronger. Our adolescent treatment center has put procedures into place to ensure that each person gets the care and support they need each day. We can help your teen manage their mental health and overcome addiction. We've prepared ourselves for the uptick of teens suffering from mental health conditions and addiction as a result of COVID-19. If your teen is suffering, we're here to help.



About Foothills at Red Oak

Located in picturesque Ellenboro, NC, Foothills at Red Oak Recovery serves adolescent boys between the ages of 14 and 17 who suffer from addiction and mental health conditions. Our treatment center is located on a sprawling 94-acre horse farm, which plays a critical role in our recovery programs. We remove our teens from the stress, hustle, and bustle of their everyday life and provide a comfortable and welcoming environment where they can recover. We offer a team of masters-level clinicians to give your teen the treatment they need.

If your teen is suffering from substance use and mental health conditions due to the ongoing pandemic, Foothills Recovery at Red Oak can help. Please call us today or visit our website to learn more about our treatment options.

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