

Strategies for Parenting Deaf Teenagers During COVID-19



Deaf teenagers are looking to the future and striving for independence. How can we help them when their efforts—and all of our lives—are being upended by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The key is to **provide strong family support**. National Deaf Center research shows that **deaf** teenagers with strong family support are more successful after high school. Family support plays an important role in the development of independence, resilience, and strength. Building a network of support that includes extended family members, friends, and role models helps caregivers and kids alike.

But that can be easier said than done. Here are some strategies to help provide strong family support for deaf teenagers and address the unique challenges created by the pandemic.

Check In With Each Other

Acknowledge and offer compassion for how disappointed, sad, angry, or frustrated your deaf teenager may be with these unprecedented circumstances. With open lines of communication, your deaf teenager can be your problem-solving partner, empowered to figure out a new daily routine or difficult online class assignment.

Use these **tips to improve communication with deaf teenagers**, which focus on reducing assumptions, creating space, and taking advantage of technology. Try new ways to communicate, such as starting a family group text. Whether by using American Sign Language (ASL) or voice-to-text phone apps, it's essential to make sure that everyone is included in conversations at home.

Encourage Connections

Social connection is vital for a teenager's mental health—a critical area of concern because deaf people face greater **mental health risks** and reduced social opportunities is one of the **root causes** of gaps in their employment and education.

Ask teens whether they've checked in with their friends or classmates recently. Group chats can be done through text messaging or video, depending on their communication preferences. If they have not tried using **video relay services** to connect with hearing friends or family, this may be a good time to start.

Connecting with deaf culture can also offer many benefits for teenagers, especially if they are the only deaf person in their family. These connections can be found through joining **Junior NAD**, seeing **#DeafSuccess stories**, or even following the hashtag #DeafTalent on social media. Motivate your child to seek out a mentor; research shows that deaf youth who participate in **mentorship programs** develop greater confidence, self-worth, and deaf identity, which can in turn build self-esteem.

Support Online Learning

Online classes are a new experience for many students, and these classes present unique challenges for deaf students. First and foremost, make sure that your child has full access and the accommodations they need. Ensure that your child's teachers **remember to address accessibility** in the rush to online instruction.

Check in with your child about how the school is managing online classes. Ask questions such as the following:

- What platforms are used?
- Are the accommodations that worked for in-person school working for an online environment, or does your child need something else? For example, would a note-taker help in an advanced placement class?
- Are ASL interpreters and speech-to-text providers included in the online learning platforms? Are videos captioned?
- If your teen uses an assistive listening device, do they know how to **use it effectively in an online environment**?
- Does your teen have what they need to **take control of their online learning**?

If your teenager gets pushback about access or accommodations, don't give up. **Know their rights** and advocate together. They have the right to participate equally in online learning, which includes access to all course content and school information.

If an individualized education plan (IEP) is in place, strive to collaborate with the school on informal agreements that could bridge gaps. Refer to **virtual IEP tip sheets** or use an **IEP app** to understand your child's rights and prepare you to work with the school. In the meantime, document any regression in academic or behavioral skills.

Set High Expectations

Families who believe that their deaf teenager will succeed make a real impact on that teen's future. According to a National Deaf Center analysis, **parental expectations** have an even greater impact than parental involvement.

Deaf children whose parents expected them to be employed after high school were more likely to enroll in college, and children whose parents expected them to attend college were more likely to complete college. In each case, young deaf adults exceeded their parents' expectations.

So set high expectations, explain why you have them, and encourage your teen to brainstorm and set their own goals.

Seek Accessible Resources

Many online games, activities, and videos are not accessible for deaf teenagers. Work with your teen to find online resources that are. Some organizations have started compiling accessible resources, such as the **National Deaf Education Conference** and the **Deaf Education Library** at Boston University.

Deafverse, the first-ever ASL-accessible online game, is a fun option and can be a useful tool for **building valuable self-determination skills** at home. Check out these **five tips for making the most of Deafverse** at home.

Keep Planning for the Future

Planning for life after high school should not stop because of this crisis. Your teen has probably been preparing already, whether that was meeting with vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors to explore potential careers, visiting colleges, signing up for summer camp, or applying for a summer job.

To keep up that planning momentum, schedule online meetings with their transition support team and VR counselors. Take advantage of colleges that are now offering virtual college tours, open houses, and even classroom experiences. Encourage teens to use this time to explore and apply for scholarships, take online classes, or volunteer.

Inspire Independence

Holding back a deaf teenager from doing activities or becoming independent can lead to challenges later in life.

Ask your teenager whether they would like to cook dinner with a new recipe, sew some face masks for your family, or repair something around the house. Encourage them to take the initiative and aim high. Online tutorials can be an opportunity for your child to build essential skills—and **self-determination**—to use throughout their life.

Know You Are Not Alone

Just like your teenager needs to connect, so do you—for assistance, information, and a like-minded group of people who understand your experiences. Check out **Hands and Voices**, the **Parent Center Hub**, **Council de Manos**, or a local group in your town. Contact the **NDC | help team**, which provides year-round assistance to families and schools.

Working together, we can support our deaf youth to endure, engage, and even excel during these extraordinary times.



This document was developed under a jointly funded grant through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, #H326D160001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the federal government.