



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF AMERICA**

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# **Managing Change:**

## **A Discussion Guide for Teens Ages 16-18**

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**BACK-TO-CLUB**



Families and youth across the country have been figuring out how to live, work and play during the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools closing early this spring and extracurricular activities cancelled, many youth have now spent weeks to months in their homes. Kids have had to adjust to tremendous changes in their lives. They have had to adapt to entirely new daily routines, like learning to do school at home and finding ways to keep busy inside. They have likely experienced special occasions that would typically involve community, friends and family – like birthdays, the last day of school and holidays – in their homes.

Many kids are experiencing a range of emotions that include both positive and negative feelings. Some of these emotions may be indifference, boredom, confusion, worry, and some kids may also be managing symptoms of anxiety and depression. With supportive relationships, consistency, comfort and reassurance, many youth are successfully navigating the significant transitions they're experiencing. Other youth may be facing additional challenges, may not have the same supports in place, and/or may not be coping as well. It is important to understand how your youth are managing the changes and how they are feeling so that you can best support their well-being.

Your Club or Youth Center may be open to some or all youth this summer and beyond, or you may be serving youth in-person, virtually, digitally, by sending take-home meals or activities, or through a combination of approaches. Transitioning to your Club or Youth Center's summer routine may bring another change for your youth. They will be looking to you for guidance on how to navigate these changes and adapt to the routines this summer and beyond.

Activities and discussions that focus on emotional well-being can help youth to process some of the changes they have experienced, explore and name their feelings, and gain tools for managing their emotions. This resource provides a series of activities and conversation starters to help youth process the changes they have experienced and to understand and manage their feelings.

## How to Use This Activity and Discussion Guide

Adolescence, ages 16-18, is characterized by some very specific cognitive and social/emotional changes. Teens in this age group:

- Continue to form their identities and to understand and define themselves.
- Show more independence from their parents and have less conflict with them. Teen's peer groups, role models, and mentors take on particular importance during this period.
- Have an increased capacity for demonstrating caring and sharing and for developing more intimate relationships.
- Feel a lot of strong emotions. Sadness and depression are elevated in teen populations.
- Are able to think abstractly. Teens are able to give reasons for their own choices, and to think beyond their personal thoughts and experiences and take other's perspectives.
- Show more concern about future school and work plans.
- Are able to set goals, develop plans and undertake the plans to achieve certain outcomes.

It's important to understand that many of the key aspects of adolescent development are related to their youth's relationships with others. Therefore, it can be particularly difficult for teens to feel disconnected or disengaged from peer groups and others.



Below you will find conversation starters for teens ages 16-18. These conversation starters are designed to be adaptable in order to best meet your programming needs. As such, you can:

- Pick the conversation starters you like and are applicable to your youth and disregard the ones that aren't
- Use them in any order
- Add in your own conversation starters
- Design activities to go along with the conversation starters

Your Club or Youth Center may be serving youth in-person under social distancing guidelines, virtually, digitally, by sending take-home meals or activities, using other approaches, or using a combination of methods. These conversation starters can be used in a range of ways. Here are some ideas.

**If serving youth virtually**, you could:

- Host and facilitate virtual conversations with youth.
- Invite specific groups of teens, like youth in a leadership club or on a sports team, to join a virtual conversation.
- Host a virtual discussion series. For example, schedule a conversation each week on a different topic and share the topics in advance.

**If serving youth digitally**, you could:

- Host digital conversations. Post a few questions each week on your Club or Youth Center's Facebook page or digital platform and ask youth to post their responses.

**If providing take-home resources**, you could:

- Create take-home packets that include the conversation starters for youth to reflect on, use as journal prompts, or discuss at home.
- Be sure to check out the guidance below on how to facilitate effective virtual programming.

## Guidance for Virtual Facilitation

- Be sure to follow the safety guidelines outlined in [Creating a Safe Live Virtual Club](#).
- The [Virtual Club QuickStart Guide](#) provides the foundation of what is necessary for addressing online safety, parental permissions, choosing a technology platform, tips for scheduling interactive sessions, and more.
- Consider your group size. A group size of approximately 8-12 youth can allow for all youth to share and also ensure that there are not long stretches with no dialogue.
- Consider hosting discussions that are approximately 45-60 minutes in length. This will give you enough time to introduce the conversation and allow youth to warm up and get engaged but not to drag on too long.
- Think about how you will facilitate the discussion and the flow of the conversation. Consider, in advance, how you will introduce the topic, which of the questions you will ask, and how you will close the conversation.
- Practice using your technology before the discussion starts.
- Start your discussion with group agreements. Guide your group through the following steps to make sure everyone feels welcome, included, and ready to participate:



- Check your tech. Does everyone know how to use the features that will allow them to fully engage in the dialogue?
- Be kind online. Always use kind words and be patient with each other.
- Listen actively. Do your best to stay present.
- Speak up. If you have been talking a lot, pause to allow others to jump in the conversation. If you haven't shared yet, look for an opportunity to let others know you are there and interested in what's going on.
- Facilitate a virtual emotional check-in to further create a safe space, a sense of connection, and get people ready to share. For example, have youth share an emoji that shows how they are feeling today.

## Additional Considerations

Before engaging youth in conversation about COVID-19, it is important you are prepared. Below are additional items to consider that will help you have a meaningful, empathetic and safe discussion with youth about their feelings and experiences related to the pandemic. Additionally, there are myths and facts about COVID-19 provided in the appendix of this guide.

### Review Your Club's Safety Policies on Disclosures of Abuse

It is essential to review your Club or Youth Center's safety policies and be prepared to respond and report, should youth disclose past or current abuse, or urgent mental health issues. For immediate safety and life-threatening mental health concerns, call 911. For concerns of past abuse or ongoing abuse, neglect, or endangerment, follow your state's mandated reporting requirements. In addition, make sure to report safety related incidents according to your organizational policies, and use the BGCA's Safety Helpline for additional support at 866-607-SAFE.

For more information, use the links below:

- [Safety Policies & Actions](#)
- [Mandated Reporting Disclosures of Abuse](#)
- [Disclosures of Abuse](#)

If you have questions about using this resource in your Club, or general safety questions, please reach out to the safety team at [childsafety@bgca.org](mailto:childsafety@bgca.org).

### Acknowledge That the Conversation May Be Sensitive for Some Youth:

Talking about uncertainty, changes, and stressors may be upsetting for youth and lead to a variety of strong emotions. Before your discussion, try saying something like:

*"This is a safe space where you can express your emotions and ask for help. Today we are going to be talking about some things that may cause you to feel some strong emotions. There is no wrong way to feel. You can pass or take a break at any point if you don't feel comfortable. Both myself and [insert name] are here to help. Does anyone have any questions before we start?"*

This statement should acknowledge that talking about these topics may be difficult, and it should encourage them to take breaks as needed and to talk about their feelings with adults that they trust.



## Report and Refer as Appropriate

This discussion guide is not a therapy or counseling tool and should not be used in this way. Some conversations may cause youth to become emotional, share personal stories about past trauma, or even open-up about their mental health.

It is important to keep in mind that you are not expected to take on the role of a therapist or counselor, nor would it be ethical for you to do so. You should, however, be able to recognize when youth are disclosing abuse or another traumatic event, and to report and refer as appropriate.

You are not alone in supporting Club youth. There are many caring adults and professionals available and able to provide support when necessary. If you have a social worker or therapist on staff, ask them to be available to step in if needed during or after program. If you do not have a social or therapist on staff and need additional guidance, be sure to connect with your supervisor.

The links below provide additional information and support:

- [BGCA's Incident Response Guide](#)
- Visit to [211.org](http://211.org) for more information on local resources.
- Utilize the free Crisis Text Line by texting CLUB or 741741 to talk with a trained crisis counselor 24/7.

## Be Honest

Your goal throughout the conversation is to help youth make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, factual and minimizes fear and stress. During the conversation, you do not have to be able to answer every question – you can say “I don’t know” and point them to available resources.

## Validate Youth and Listen to Their Voices

When you are asking youth to share their feelings, it is important to respond to them with validation that you are listening. It’s also important not to tell youth how they should feel or that you know how they feel.

Amplify their voices, not yours. Avoid talking about how you feel/how you think they should feel. Give youth this time to be center stage. Don’t discount member’s feelings with statements such as “You are going to be fine” or “I know how you feel.” These statements shut down the conversation and youth may no longer feel safe bringing up their emotions.

**TIP:** Two ways to validate youth’s feelings are to reflect back what you hear them saying and to ask clarifying questions. Here are some statements and questions to help validate youth:

- Reflect back what you hear youth saying by saying “What I hear you saying is...”, “I can hear that you feel...”, and “Your feelings are totally valid. You’re not alone. Can anyone else relate to this feeling?”
- Ask clarifying questions like “How are you feeling about things now?”, “What do you wish would happen?”, and “What was your reaction to that?”



## Conversation Starters

Conversation starters are provided below to help you facilitate discussions with your teens on how they are managing change during COVID-19. The intention of these conversation starters is to provide a space for teens to talk about their feelings, how they are coping, and how they are connecting with themselves and others in their community.

NOTE: Not all of your youth may live in “homes”. Some may live in temporary housing, shelters, hotels/motels or other places. Try to use inclusive language like “where you are staying during the coronavirus” when facilitating this activity and conversation.

### Explore Feelings

*We've all been through a lot of changes recently and it's totally normal to experience a lot of emotions in response to those changes. For example, you may feel happy, relaxed, safe, worried, bored, lonely and more. Sometimes you may not feel indifferent and not have strong feelings at all. All of these emotions are normal. Let's discuss some of the emotions you have experienced.*

- What are some words that describe your feelings?
- How are you feeling today?
- What are some of the positive emotions that you have experienced during the quarantine?
- What are some of the unpleasant emotions that you have experienced during the quarantine?
- What concerns do you have?
- It's definitely okay to be feeling sad, worried or anxious right now, and you should let yourself feel those feelings. What are the things you do when you feel sad or worried?
- What do you miss the most right now? How does it make you feel? What are the things you do when you feel that way?
- Are there milestones or special events you are missing this year? How does it make you feel? What are the things that you do when you feel that way?



## Managing Emotions

*Being quarantined for so long can be hard, especially when we are used to going to school, going to the Club or Youth Center, engaging in extracurricular activities, and seeing friends. Some days may be fun and other days may be boring. There are probably people that you are spending a lot of time with and others that you miss seeing. Let's talk about how you are connecting with others, taking care of yourself, and let's share some ideas with each other.*

- What is your day at home like? What do you do in the mornings? Afternoons? Evenings?
- What are some of the experiences or activities that you are enjoying?
- What do you most miss doing?
- Have you spent time with any friends, family, teachers or Club or Youth Center staff by phone, email, video chat or other ways? How have you connected?
- Who do you most miss seeing?
- Who are the people you feel like you can talk to when you're feeling overwhelmed by what's happening right now?
- What have you tried that's worked for you when you feel overwhelmed? What advice would you give to others?
- There's a lot that can feel like feel like it is out of your control right now. What do you feel like you do have control over right now?
- What do you most need from others in your life right now?
- How can this group support each other right now?

## Managing Change

*We have all experienced a lot of changes in our lives since the pandemic started, like schools closing, spending a lot of time inside, and adjusting to new routines. Let's talk about some of the changes that you have experienced and how you are managing them.*

- What are some of the positive things you have experienced during the pandemic and social distancing (e.g., time with family, calling friends on the phone, celebrating a specific event, etc.)?
- What are some of the things that you have disliked about social distancing (e.g., being inside all day, missing friends from school, missing the Club or Youth Center, etc.)?
- Did you and your family have any events or special occasions during this time at home? What were they?



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- What was different about these events? How did you feel about that?
- Were there any special events that you were looking forward to that didn't happen because of coronavirus? (e.g., graduation, prom, a vacation, a family reunion, sports events, an end-of-school celebration, etc.)?
- How have you focused on you or taken care of yourself during this time period?
- Having a routine can be helpful during uncertain times. What has worked for you? How have you built a routine? Are there certain things you're doing each day?
- What are the new ways you've been able to stay connected with your friends and family?
- What do you feel that you most need from your friends, family or other communities that you are a part of right now?
- What is the one thing you can't wait to do once you no longer have to socially distance? What have you been craving?
- Who is the first person you're going to go and see in-person?
- What have you learned about yourself from this experience?
- What have you learned about other people from this experience?



## Appendix: Myths and Facts

There's so much information swirling around right now about COVID-19 that it's hard to know what's a fact or a myth. Here are some of the most common myths about COVID-19 and the facts that you can use in your conversations with youth.

- **MYTH: COVID-19 is only a problem for older people or people who are already sick.**
- **FACT: Everyone is at risk for contracting COVID-19, regardless of your age.**
  - Older adults and people of any age who have serious medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. However, people of all age can and have contracted the virus. Children typically only exhibit mild symptoms if infected, but they can give the virus to other people long after symptoms disappear
  
- **MYTH: There are many ways to treat or cure COVID-19.**
- **FACT: No home remedies have been proven to prevent you from getting COVID-19.**
  - Other supposed remedies, such as gargling with bleach and taking chloroquine, the drug commonly used to treat Malaria, can actually be downright dangerous. The best way to protect yourself from getting COVID-19 or the group of illnesses caused by the novel coronavirus include:
    - Social distancing or staying at least 6 feet away from people who do not live with you on a regular basis and avoiding places where you're likely to be in close contact with other people
  
- **MYTH: COVID-19 is just like the seasonal flu.**
- **FACT: COVID-19 is more serious and more deadly than the seasonal flu.**
  - Aches and pains, sore throat, fever – although they may feel similar to those suffering from their symptoms, the coronavirus is not the same as the seasonal flu. COVID-19 is significantly deadlier than the seasonal flu. People with COVID-19 also show significant breathing problems compared to those with the flu.
  
- **MYTH: I'm not experiencing any of the common symptoms of COVID-19 like a dry cough, fever, and body aches, so I can carry on with my life as normal.**
- **FACT: Some people may only experience mild symptoms while others may not show any symptoms of the disease but have the virus.**
  - Being asymptomatic, which means carrying the virus around without being really sick, helps spread COVID-19 from person to person. A person carrying the virus may falsely assume that it's ok to do business as usual- not practicing WASH-UP and social distancing – meanwhile the virus is being spread to their close family, friends and strangers alike. To be on the safe side, follow guidance from the experts on how to stay healthy and do your part to prevent the spread of the disease.



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## Sources

- ClubX Blog, Managing Stress Using the Crisis Text Line: <https://clubexperience.blog/2020/03/19/managing-stress-using-the-crisis-text-line/#more-6349>
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