

Be There for Others Even While Apart

Learn how to help your loved ones during a tough time.

Jackie Covell (left) and Justina Schlund

May is coming to an end. That means summer is almost here! However, this season might look a little different from summers in the past. After all, the coronavirus has changed the world. People are staying home and keeping apart from others. Many stores, movie theaters, restaurants, and camps are closed. Still, we can find ways to stay connected.

Some kids may be feeling down these days. Many are missing their friends or their favorite activities. It is important to help anyone who might be struggling. When we reach out, we remind loved ones that they are not alone.

As Mental Health Month comes to a close, *News-O-Matic* is here to help. We asked two experts how to be there for others. Justina Schlund is an expert on social and emotional learning (SEL) in Chicago, Illinois, and Jackie Covell is a clinical school psychologist in New York City. Here are some of the tips that they shared with us:

1. Notice When a Friend Needs Help

Pay attention to how your friends are acting. Maybe they have been quiet lately or haven't been answering your messages. Perhaps they are sleeping for too long or not long enough. These could all be signs that your friends are struggling. "Notice when somebody needs you," Covell said. "It's not that different from seeing your friend struggling at

school.”

Schlund said being a friend is a very important job. You have a key responsibility toward your friends. “Let them know that you care,” she explained.

2. Put Yourself in Their Shoes

Take a moment to imagine your friends’ lives. What do their home situations look like? How might they be feeling — and what could be the reasons for that? What types of thoughts could they be having?

“Think about what your friends might need right now,” Schlund explained, “and try to find creative ways to help them.”

3. Listen Up!

Sometimes a friend just wants to be heard. So, open your ears and let your friend talk! “You can give them a call,” Schlund said. “Just be there to really listen and empathize with them.”

The expert added a final thought: “You don’t need to give them all the solutions to their problems.” You just have to be there to hear what they have to say. That shows that you care!

4. Say Something

After you are done listening, you can use your words to encourage them. Let your friends know that it’s OK to have strong emotions. “All of us are in a new situation,” Covell explained, “and this can bring about new feelings and new behaviors.” However your friend is feeling, *it is normal*.

Schlund and Covell gave several examples of things you can say:

- “I care about you; would you like to talk?”
- “I’m here for you if there is anything you’d like to share with me.”
- “Whatever surprises are coming your way, it’s really all going to be OK.”
- “I was thinking about you, and I care.”

5. Share Something

A person who is struggling might *not* want to talk — and that is OK too. However, “someone who doesn’t want to talk still probably wants to know that you care about them,” Schlund explained.

Instead of talking, you can choose to simply share with your friend. For example, you can make a playlist of songs you think they may like or send them a funny video. “If you’re an artist, you can draw a picture,” suggested Schlund. You can also share a meal on a video call or watch a favorite TV show together. You can share a memory by sending a photo or writing about a funny experience you had together. And of course, you can always share a phone call, a letter, a smile, or a poem.

“If you see something that might interest your friend,” Covell added, “send it!” Covell said that one small act of kindness “can change that kid’s day.”

Note: If a friend says something that worries you, tell them to talk to a trusted adult. If you think your friend is not safe, tell a parent or an adult you trust.

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