

Published at: <https://www.poliklinika-djeca.hr/en/>

## **ADVICE FOR ADOLESCENTS: How to balance your desires and needs with adherence to measures**

By: Mia Roje Đapić, MSc. of psychology

When you're 12, 15, or 17, one of the things you most want to do is hang out with friends. We adults know this because young people tell us in research and clinical practice, and some of us remember ourselves, our needs and desires ten, twenty or more years ago. Although a lot has changed since we grew up, so now you hang out behind small screens, nothing can replace live contact.

Until a few months ago, parents (and we other adults) were bored to warn ourselves that we should detach ourselves from the screen, take a walk and support each other outdoors. Now all of a sudden it can't or can't under these and those conditions. Some of your friends probably don't go out at all, some go out as if nothing is happening, and the rules your parents set for you probably sometimes seem silly, exaggerated, and you don't like it. It probably occurs to you that they (we) don't understand anything anyway because they were young a thousand years ago, you feel that what is uncertain by adult standards is safe. This text isn't there to tell you to stand at home and not see anyone, to instill in you a sense of guilt that you might infect someone's grandmother. This text is there to bring you closer to the concept of responsibility and to offer some solutions that are not ideal, but are good enough. How to socialize and be responsible?

Accepting responsibility leads to a great conclusion - the desire to change the outside world stems from a change in ourselves. People who do not take responsibility wait for the things they want to happen, but at the same time unknowingly make it impossible by their passive or, in the wrong direction, active action. In the current situation, a person who does not accept responsibility could behave completely carelessly and, if he becomes infected, blame bad luck for it. She could insist on organizing a party for 20 friends, so that when her parents don't allow it, she would feel great anger and loneliness because "she can't hang out with anyone."

Responsible people accept that the world is not black and white, but they see a lot of shades of gray in between. If a party with friends is what you imagine, and it may not be quite so ideal, it does not mean that other options do not apply at all.

Taking responsibility means being flexible and finding a balance between the demands of the environment, your own desires and needs. To be able to do this, in the current situation we must first understand what all this means. Environmental requirements are currently measures of the competent institutions (for example, the ban on gathering and staying in public areas) - they are changing and it is important to monitor them. Your own wishes can



be various, for example to organize a birthday party and invite all your friends. We all have the same needs, and in this context they relate to security and social cohesion. How to match them?

No one said being responsible was easy. Being responsible sometimes means giving up on something. As we cannot give up our needs and the demands of the environment (they are not exactly under our control), we can give up desires or adapt them. It is sometimes difficult and painful. It is okay to feel anger, sadness, injustice and any unpleasant emotion when we give up desires. But when that first wave passes, we are still left with what we have not given up. And then it's time to get creative.

You need to feel safe and connected with your friends, but also adhere to social distancing measures. How? You may be able to use a variety of apps to chat and play games with friends, record videos and photos online. You can make plans for everything you will do once this is over. A Skype or WhatsApp video call is a lot more fun when it's themed, when you drink cappuccino together or eat dinner. Instead of a cafe it is okay to sit in the park at a sufficient distance, each with his own thermos. The walk is less lonely with a friend on the other end of the line walking in his neighborhood at the same time. You probably have even better ideas for yourself and your company.

Parents have a double responsibility - both for you and for themselves. If Peter from the class was just allowed to go outside, and you weren't, you will experience that the situation is unfair. It's okay that you don't like some rules and you can probably negotiate some. Some don't. When you think about rules, try to focus on what you lose and the good that comes from them. If an elderly person or a lung patient lives with you, it is clear that more caution is needed than with any of your friends. With heightened caution, you contribute to the safety of someone you love personally, or someone who is also "someone's someone". By giving up our desires, we sometimes achieve more values and goals. It feels good to do good.

Finally, your friends have a personal responsibility too. If they invite you to activities that are guided by desires, not needs and the reality of the situation we are in, you can direct them to that. If you are seriously endangering yourself and / or others, you will contact an adult. But if they continue with some risky behaviors, you can do as much as you can and no more than that. The responsibility lies with them, their parents and the adults you spoke to. And that behavior is part of that outside world that we can't fully influence.

It is not easy to be mature and responsible. It is often not easy for us adults either, so we understand that it is not easy for you either. If it's sometimes too much, contact someone you trust, at least over the phone or app. Take some important lessons responsibly from this situation, so enjoy every party and hug with full lungs when the time comes for them. Until then, enjoy with full lungs what you have at the moment.

