

Promoting Optimal Health during Adolescence

For adolescents, health promotion involves helping youth acquire the power (including knowledge, attitudes, and skills), authority (permission to use their power), and opportunities to make choices that increase the likelihood of positive expressions of health for themselves. A comprehensive approach to health promotion combines activities aimed at individuals with interventions focused on changing norms, attitudes, and behaviors of peer groups, families, communities, and society at large.

The rationale for focusing on health issues becomes obvious when one examines the major sources of mortality and morbidity during adolescence. The leading causes of mortality during adolescence in the United States are motor vehicle crashes, other accidental injuries, homicide, and suicide, which together are responsible for approximately 75% of all adolescent deaths ([Blum and Qureshi, 2011](#); [Eaton, Kann, Kinchen, et al, 2012](#)). The sources of morbidity in adolescence include injury (primarily motor vehicle related), depression, eating disorders, substance use, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and pregnancy; obesity may begin in childhood or adolescence, with secondary health consequences becoming evident in adolescence. Health promotion for this age group consists mainly of teaching and guidance to avoid risk-taking activities and health-damaging behaviors. Adolescence provides an opportunity for teenagers to incorporate healthy lifestyle behaviors that will benefit them not only during the teenage years but also throughout the life span.

Effective health promotion for adolescents should incorporate a developmentally appropriate, multifaceted approach and incorporate adolescents' perspectives on what health means. One strategy for health promotion used by nurses and other professionals in health care settings is the one-on-one health screening (see [Nursing Care Guidelines](#) box). Through a health screening interview, the health professional can identify both assets and threats to an adolescent's health and well-being, and provides an opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the adolescent. In addition, the health screening interview provides an opportunity