

TEEN MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT



The majority of mental health challenges are diagnosed during teenage and young adult years. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, about 17% of youth ages 6-17 experiences a mental health disorder. When teens are coping with a mental health challenge, it can impact all aspects of their life including school, relationships, and even physical health. This toolkit will bring awareness on how to support teens with their mental health and review how this is a critical component of substance misuse prevention.

About one in four youth in the United States will witness or experience at least one traumatic event by the time they turn 18. Some examples of traumatic events include sudden or violent loss of a loved one, physical or sexual assault, life threatening illness, abuse, neglect, community violence, national disasters, military family-related stressors, serious accidents, and divorce. This list is not comprehensive, and the experience of trauma is a deeply personal one; what is a traumatic experience for one person may not be traumatic for another person and vice versa. When examining teen mental health, it is important to note that trauma is a risk factor for almost all mental health challenges. For more information about the intersection of mental health and trauma and additional trauma-informed resources, visit: <https://www.nctsn.org/>



Anxiety Disorders

Feelings of excessive uneasiness, worry, and fear

Depression

Depressed mood that impacts thoughts, feelings, and daily activities

Mental Health and Trauma

Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with daily life

Eating Disorders

Extreme and abnormal eating behaviors such as refusing to eat or self-induced vomiting after eating

For additional information related to mental health conditions that teens experience, visit: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/>

Understanding Mental Health

Mental Health Disorder/Challenge

A wide range of conditions that affect your mood, emotions, thinking, and behavior

Mental Health

Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being

Mental Illness

A mental health disorder or challenge that is severe enough for a doctor to make a diagnosis

Behavioral Health

The promotion of mental well-being, the treatment of mental and substance use disorders, and the support of those who experience and/or are in recovery from these conditions

Substance Use and Mental Health

It is important for teens to know that substance use can vastly impact their physical and mental health. Substances like alcohol, marijuana, tobacco/nicotine, prescription drugs, and others are very addictive. They can cause long-term damage to teens' brains and bodies including an increased risk for depression and suicide, impaired self-control and decision-making skills, and memory problems.

Teens are particularly susceptible to addiction because their brains are still developing. Our prefrontal cortex, which is in charge of emotion regulation and impulse control, doesn't fully develop until our mid-twenties. Exposing the brain to substances as a teen can literally rewire our brain and make us more vulnerable to mood disorders, permanent lowering of impulse control, and developing substance use disorders and/or addiction in adulthood. Substance use can change the way the brain works, making it more likely that we'll experience mental health challenges.



Recognizing Signs of Early Mental Health Issues

Sleeping too much or too little

Avoiding social activities

Having thoughts of suicide

Fear of gaining weight;
not eating; throwing up

Extreme difficulty in
concentrating



Feeling sad or withdrawn
for more than 2 weeks

Intense worries or fear that
get in the way of life

Losing interest in things
they used to like to do



Technology, Social Media, and Mental Health

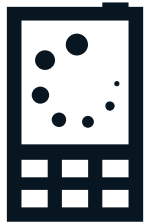
While technology and social media can be wonderful tools for connecting with others, staying up to date with current events, and furthering substance misuse prevention efforts, studies have shown that heavy use correlates to an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts in teens.



Technology and social media use among teens can lead to disruption in sleep, worsening feelings of fear of missing out (FoMO), negative body image and increased body surveillance (monitoring one's body and being judgmental of it), feelings of jealousy and ineptitude, increased risk of cyberbullying, and dissatisfaction with life.

The good news is there are simple steps teens can take to have a healthier relationship with technology and social media.

Encourage them to discontinue the use of electronics at least one hour before they go to bed



Invite them to limit their screen time to two hours a day or less (with the exception of virtual learning)

Talk to them about media literacy, particularly how advertisements on social media are there to influence their thoughts and behaviors

Work with them to set screen-free times throughout the day and fill those times with other activities such as being outside, hanging out with friends, or engaging in a hobby they enjoy

Remind them about the importance of not comparing themselves to others when looking at social media; encourage them to follow positive accounts that encourage physically and mentally healthy lifestyles



If applicable, encourage them to set time limits for social media applications using the time limit feature on their smart phones

Tips for Helping Teens Talk About Their Mental Health

Use "I" comments to begin the conversation and share with them what you have observed about their behavior.

- Ask them:
- How they are feeling
 - Questions that allow them to share how they have been feeling

Listen to what they're sharing with you. Provide them with the opportunity to express themselves while remaining engaged, non-judgemental, and calm.

Offer them hope and remind them that they are not alone; you are here to help them get through this.

- Ask them:
- If they've thought about what they might need to get better
 - To think about and identify ways you can help them

Normalize the conversation by sharing with them that experiencing a mental health issue is more common than they might think.

Seeking Help

There are a multitude of ways individuals can cope with a mental health condition including a variety of medical and/or psychological treatments, support groups, and self-care. Many individuals find it beneficial to utilize multiple supports to aid in the recovery process; it can take time find the combination that works best. Some good options for where to start are:



A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER OR PEDIATRICIAN

SCHOOL COUNSELORS OR SOCIAL WORKERS

SCHOOL NURSES OR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

COMMUNITY-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE CLINICS



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) also provides an online mental health services and treatment locator here: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

It is critical to offer support to the teen when they are seeking help; whether it is setting up an appointment with their pediatrician, accompanying them to a visit with their school social worker, or helping them research mental health supports, let them know you will be there for them however they feel most comfortable. Staying connected with them every step of the way will ensure they gain access to the resources they need.

If a teen needs immediate help, call 911.

Additional Resources For Teens:

KANSAS SUICIDE PREVENTION HEADQUARTERS
800-273-8255 OR WWW.KSHPQ.ORG (ONLINE CHAT OPTION)

CRISIS TEXT LINE
TEXT KANSAS TO 741741

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK OR WWW.SUICIDPREVENTIONLIFELINE.ORG (ONLINE CHAT OPTION)

Reducing Stigma

Many negative beliefs and attitudes exist about mental illness and people who experience mental health conditions; this is called stigma. Stigma is very damaging because it can lead to discrimination, isolating individuals experiencing mental illness and preventing them from seeking help. There are many ways we can reduce stigma around mental illness including:

Talking openly about mental health and encouraging other people to do the same

Using respectful language and avoiding stigmatizing words such as crazy, psycho, or wacko

Speaking up to confront misconceptions about mental health

Showing support to family members, friends, and others coping with mental health challenges

Offering help if someone is experiencing a mental health challenge

Stress Management

There are different types of stress and not all stress is bad; the daily stress we experience can actually help us become more resilient and motivate us to accomplish things as long as it doesn't become too overwhelming. When teens feel too stressed, it can impact their health and keep them from completing daily tasks.

Supporting Teens Who Are Experiencing Excess Stress

Help them check themselves by reviewing symptoms of too much stress including crying, headaches, loneliness, neck aches, chest tightness, difficulty sleeping, aggressiveness, substance use to relax, nervousness, irritability, stomach aches, anger, excessive sweating, restlessness, eating too much or too little.

Share with them exercises to help relieve their stress in the moment. Remind them that practicing these exercises when they are not stressed will make them more effective in a stressful moment.

BREATHING EXERCISES

- **Inhale/Exhale:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the room. Inhale slowly through your nose, counting to four in your head. Exhale slowly through your mouth, counting to four in your head. Repeat 5-10 times. Practice this exercise every day.
- **Box Breathing:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the room. Count to five in your head as you slowly exhale, getting all of the air out of your lungs. Inhale slowly through your nose, counting to five in your head. Hold your breath while counting to five in your head. Exhale slowly through your mouth while counting to five in your head. Repeat 5-10 times. Practice this every day.

MEDITATION EXERCISES

- **Phrase Meditation:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Close your eyes or find a spot in the room to focus on and take a few deep inhales and exhales. Pick a word such as RELAX or CALM or a phrase like I AM STRONG. For the next few minutes, slowly repeat the word or phrase out loud or in your head as you inhale and exhale.
- **Counting Mediation:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Close your eyes or find a spot in the room to focus on and take a few deep inhales and exhales. In your head, count down from 100 to 1. Trying not to think about anything else; if you lose your count or find your mind wandering, start again from 100. If you reach 1, take a few deep inhales and exhales.

VISUALIZATION EXERCISES

- **Vacation:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Close your eyes or find a spot in the room to focus on and take a few deep inhales and exhales. Imagine you are in your very favorite place to be. Take a few minutes to visualize everything around you in your favorite place. Take in every detail of your favorite place, including feelings, sights, smells, and sounds. When you're ready to leave your favorite place, slowly open your eyes.
- **5,4,3,2,1:** Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down. Take a few deep inhales and exhales. In your head, name five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.



Encourage Teens to Build Coping Skills

- > EATING HEALTHY
- > SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE
- > AVOIDING SUBSTANCE USE
- > MAKING TIME TO EXERCISE
- > BUILDING A HEALTHY SUPPORT NETWORK OF PEOPLE THEY TRUST
- > SPEND TIME THINKING ABOUT AND EXPRESSING THEIR EMOTIONS
- > PRACTICING GOOD HYGIENE BY BATHING DAILY, BRUSHING THEIR TEETH TWICE A DAY, AND FLOSSING DAILY
- > KEEPING THEIR CAFFEINE INTAKE LOW
- > GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP EVERY NIGHT



Resources

Kansas Suicide Prevention HQ
www.ksphq.org

Kansas Prevention Collaborative
www.kansaspreventioncollaborative.org/

Teen Mental Health
www.teenmentalhealth.org

Go Ask Alice
www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

KDHE Youth Health Guide
<https://www.kdheks.gov/whyks/index.htm>

Teens Health
http://teenshealth.org/teen/your_mind/

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI)
www.nami.org

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
<https://www.nctsn.org/>

References

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Identifying Signs of Stress In Your Children and Teens. Retrieved from American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress-children>

Amir-Yaffee, G. (n.d.). 10 Cool Meditations for Pre-Teens and Teens. Retrieved from Do You Yoga: <https://www.doyou.com/10-cool-meditations-for-pre-teens-and-teens-67578/>

Dr. Stan Kutcher, M. F., Mina Hashish, B., & Emma Johnston, B. (2019). Teening Your Parent - Adolescent Development: A Primer for Teens.

Elina Mir, C. N. (n.d.). Social Media and Adolescents' and Young Adults' Mental Health. Retrieved from National Center for Health Research: <https://www.center4research.org/social-media-affects-mental-health/>

Joseph, D. B. (2020, March 25). 10 Meditation Techniques For Teens To Deal With Anxiety And Stress. Retrieved from Mom Junction: https://www.momjunction.com/articles/meditation-techniques-for-teens_00330301/#gref

Mayo Clinic Staff. (n.d.). Mental Illness. Retrieved from Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). Talking to Adolescents and Teens: Starting the Conversation. Retrieved from Mental Health America: <https://www.mhanational.org/talking-adolescents-and-teens-starting-conversation>

Mental Health First Aid USA. (2019). teen Mental Health First Aid: A manual for young people in 10th-12th grade helping their friends. Washington, DC: National Council for Behavioral Health.

National Alliance on Mental Illness. (n.d.). How to Help a Friend. Retrieved from National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Teens-Young-Adults/How-to-Help-a-Friend>

National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). Child and Adolescent Mental Health. Retrieved from National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/index.shtml>

Nemours. (n.d.). Teaching Kids to Be Smart About Social Media. Retrieved from KidsHealth: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/social-media-smarts.html>

Teen Mental Health. (n.d.). Mental Disorders. Retrieved from Teen Mental Health: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/>

Whitney DG, P. M. (2019). US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. JAMA Pediatrics, 173(4):389-391.



To find the toolkits and other prevention resources visit:
<http://www.kansaspreventioncollaborative.org>
<http://www.dccca.org/prevention-resources>