

# SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD THROUGH SECONDARY 3

A PARENT GUIDE TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT & WELL-BEING

PARENT ENGAGEMENT 2026





# Adolescence: A Developmental Lens



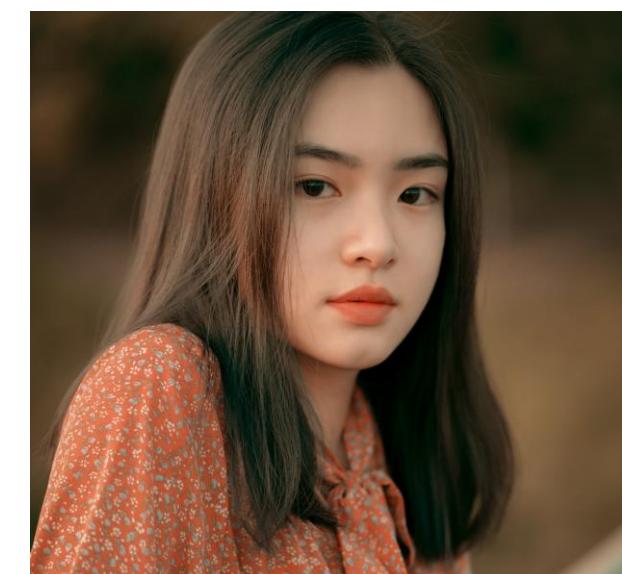
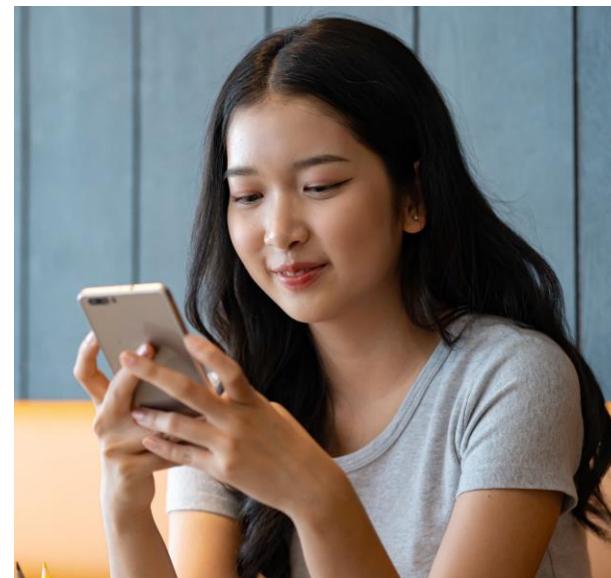
- Cognitive processes
  - More abstract, critical thinking
- Identity formation
  - “Who am I?” exploration
- Social orientation
  - Peer approval becomes central
- Emotional regulation
  - Fluctuating mood patterns

This period is seen as a developmental disequilibrium, where environmental demands outpace the maturation of self-regulation capacities. These changes are normal, not signs of defiance or failure.



# Why Teens Can Appear Different at Home?

Why parents often notice child seems more distant, withdrawn or absorbed with peers.  
This can be traced to several developmental processes:



## Search for Autonomy

Adolescents naturally seek independence as part of forming a distinct sense of self. This process does not signify a rejection of their parents rather, it represents a typical shift in social focus and self-definition.

## Heightened Social Sensitivity

Peer approval becomes significant. Research from Singapore shows that social anxiety and fear of judgment often increase between ages 10 and 13, especially in girls, leading to self-consciousness and avoidance of certain interactions.

## Adolescence & Identity Formation

Identity development encompasses experimentation, boundary testing, and self-reflective processing. During this period, teens often push limits as they engage in cognitive and emotional exploration.

# Common Psychological Patterns in Teens

## Unhelpful Thinking Patterns (Cognitive Distortions)

Catastrophic thinking

"One bad grade ruins my future"

Fixed mindset beliefs

"I'm just not good at this"

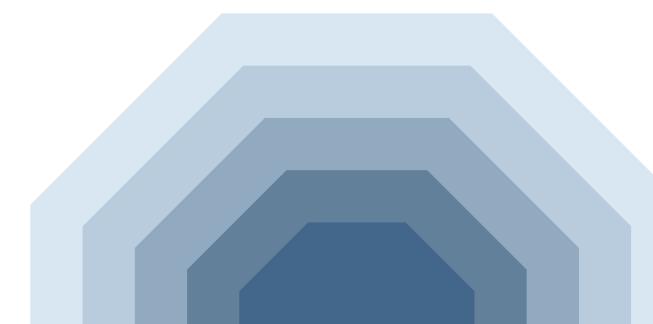
Social comparison bias

"Everyone else is coping better than me"

Help-seeking stigma

"Asking means I'm weak"

Identifying these in conversation allows parents to help teens reframe unhelpful interpretations with calmer, evidence-based alternatives.



# Common Sources of Stress Among Secondary 3 Girls

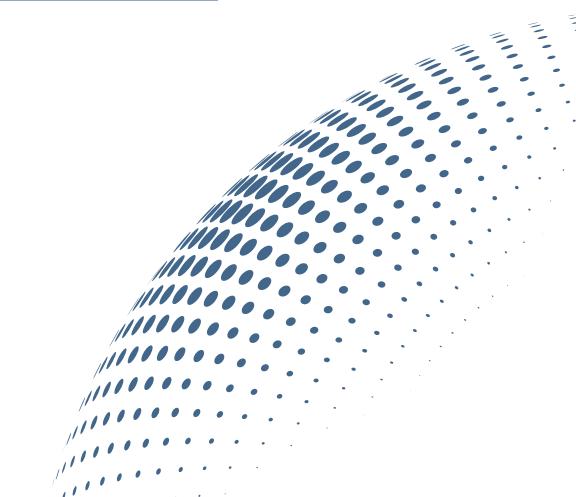
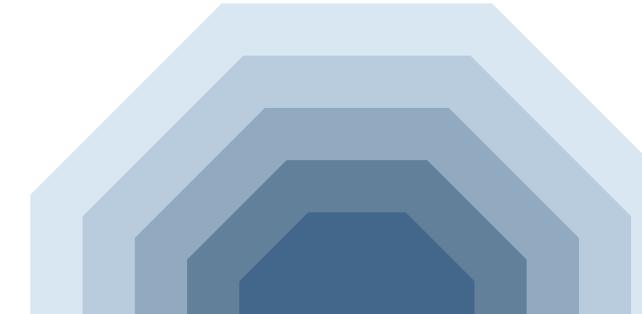
Social Comparison  
Perfectionism

Academic Pressure  
Fear of Disappointment

**What many students grapple with in silence...**

Body Image  
Self-Esteem Concerns

Fear of Embarrassment



# What Appears to Be Attitude Could Actually Be Stress

What parents may see:

Procrastination

Avoidance

Emotional shutdown

Irritability

What it frequently indicates:

Anxiety

Emotional exhaustion

Fear of failure

Feelings of overwhelm

These behaviours often signal internal stress rather than intentional resistance.

TIP: A non-judgmental, curious stance ("I notice... I'm wondering...") can open more constructive dialogue.

# Understanding Challenges & Impact of Sec 3

Sec 3 students face increased leadership responsibilities in their class and CCA, often linking their self-worth to achievements, which may lead to excessive stress and negatively affect their mental health.

## School Responsibilities

Leadership Roles  
High self-expectations

## Social Media Impact

Comparison Culture  
Callous Communication

## Adolescent Changes

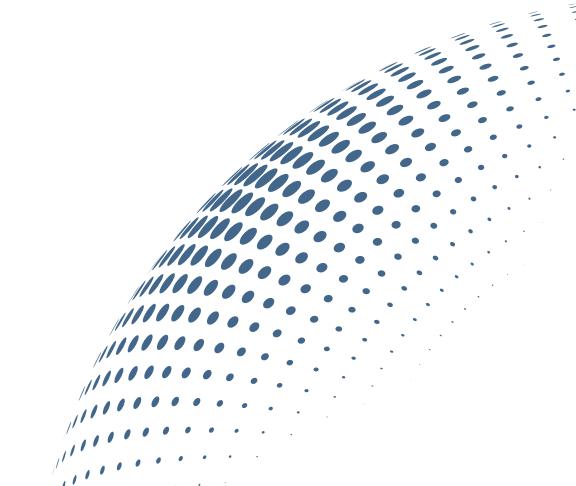
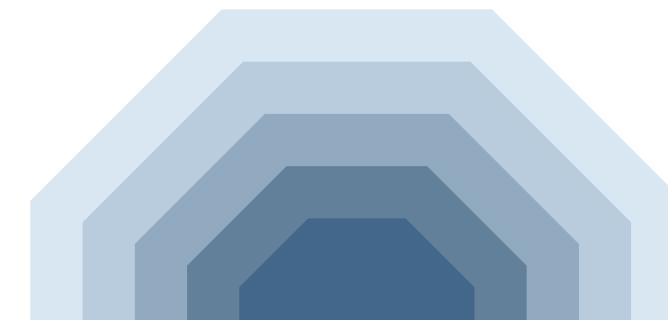
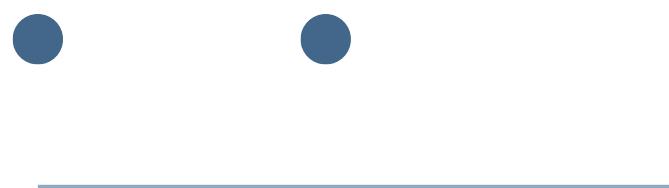
Identity-formation  
Individuation



Academic &  
Achievement stressors

Pessimistic view of r/s  
Mental Health decline

Conflicts  
Emotional vulnerability



# Mental Health Considerations in Adolescence

Adolescence is not only about growth — it is also a period of vulnerability to internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation.

THE STRAITSTIMES

## NUS study finds gap in parents' understanding of mental distress as 1 in 3 youth reports symptoms

Sign up now: Get ST's newsletters delivered to your inbox



THE STRAITSTIMES

S'pore study shows girls a lot more anxious than boys about being judged negatively

## S'pore study shows girls a lot more anxious than boys about being judged negatively

Sign up now: Get ST's newsletters delivered to your inbox



THE STRAITSTIMES

Mental disorders significantly impact youth aged 10-14 in Singapore: Lancet study

Sign up now: Get ST's newsletters delivered to your inbox



Anxiety is the invisible disorder among kids: 'I was suffering every day in school'

Sign up now: Get tips on how to help your child succeed



## The state of well-being of Singapore's youth

To assess the overall mental health of those aged 15 - 35 living in Singapore, the Institute of Mental Health carried out its first National Youth Mental Health Study in 2022. Here are the key findings:

### Symptoms of depression

Nearly 15 per cent, or about one in seven youth,



had severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, such as feeling sad, empty and a lack of interest and pleasure in activities most of the time.

Those more likely to have had severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression were:

- Aged 20 - 24 (versus those aged 30 - 35)
- Single (v married)
- Unemployed (v employed)
- From junior colleges or vocational schools (v universities)
- From families with a monthly household income of below \$5,000 (v \$10,000 - \$19,999)

### Symptoms of anxiety

About 27 per cent, or more than one in four youth,



had severe or extremely severe symptoms of anxiety, such as feeling worried, tense and restless most of the time.

Those more likely to have had severe or extremely severe symptoms of anxiety were:

- Aged 15 - 24 (v those aged 30 - 35)
- Females (v males)
- Single (v married)
- From junior colleges or vocational schools (v universities)
- From families with a monthly household income of below \$5,000 (v \$10,000 - \$19,999)

### Symptoms of stress

Nearly 13 per cent, or about one in eight youth,



felt severe to extremely severe levels of stress, including being unable to relax or feeling upset or irritable most of the time.

Those more likely to have severe or extremely severe levels of stress were:

- Aged 15 - 24 (v those aged 30 - 35)
- Unemployed (v employed)



### Factors linked to mental health symptoms

#### Excessive social media use

About 27 per cent, or more than one in four youth,



reported spending more than three hours on social media platforms daily, which was defined as excessive in the study.

Those more likely to engage in excessive social media usage were:

- Aged below 30 (v those aged 30 - 35)
- Females (v males)
- Unemployed (v employed)
- From vocational schools (v universities)

#### Body shape concerns

About 20 per cent, or one in five youth,



had moderate to severe body shape concerns, such as negative body image or excessive concerns about body shape that are typically associated with eating disorders.

Those more likely to experience body shape concerns were:

- Aged 20 - 29 (v those aged 30 - 35)
- Females (v males)

#### Cyber bullying

About 21 per cent, or one in five youth,



had been cyber bullied, encountering threats, harassment, or mean, aggressive or rude messages online.

The prevalence was similar across the different age groups and gender.

**2 times** Young people who had experienced cyber bullying were about twice as likely to have had severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress, than those who had not.

**Young people who had moderate to severe body image concerns were also 2.6 times more likely to have been cyber bullied than those without such concerns.**

**1.5 times** depression   **1.3 times** anxiety   **1.6 times** stress

**4.9 times** depression   **4.3 times** anxiety   **4.5 times** stress

#### Other factors

Vaping, smoking and adverse childhood experiences were also associated with severe or extremely severe symptoms of depression or anxiety.

PHOTO: The Straits Times

# Evolving Role of Parents

(Yet Its Importance Remains)

Transitioning from Manager to Guide

Emphasize collaboration over control

Focus on coaching rather than fixing

Foster curiosity instead of interrogation

**BEING PRESENT LAYS A SOLID FOUNDATION**



# EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

## 01 FOSTER EMOTION COACHING

Rather than minimizing emotions, acknowledge them. This supports emotional regulation skills, which are still maturing in adolescence.

Example: "It makes sense that this feels overwhelming — let's talk about which part seems hardest."

## 02 PROMOTE METACOGNITION

Encourage reflection on strategies rather than outcomes. This supports the development of executive functioning and self-directed learning.

Example: "What helped you focus in that study session? What didn't work?"

## 03 NORMALIZE HELP-SEEKING

Discuss that seeking assistance from teachers, counsellors, or well-trained professionals is a strength, not a weakness. Early help-seeking is associated with better outcomes than struggling in silence.

## 04 MAINTAIN CONNECTEDNESS

Emotional closeness, acceptance, and consistent support are strong protective factors against distress, while punitive or overly controlling responses can increase psychological risk.

# How Parents Can Support Effectively

Your response shapes how your child perceives stress

Process over outcomes

Instead of "Why did you score like this?"

Curiosity over judgment

Validation does not mean agreement

Guidance over control

Supporting Independence (With Structure)

Consider asking:

- "What worked for you this time?"
- "What support might help next?"

This builds metacognition and self-efficacy

- "It makes sense that this feels overwhelming."
- "Struggling doesn't mean failing."
- "I may not fully agree, but I want to understand how this feels for you."

Adolescents still need scaffolding.

- Co-plan routines and allow age-appropriate decision-making
- Offer guidance, not micromanagement



# Simple Framework to Reinforce

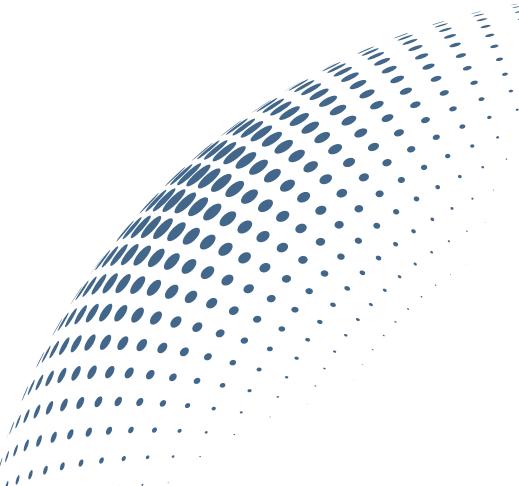
Encourage your child to remember:

- Plan → not Panic
- Ask → not Avoid
- Adjust → not Give Up
- Rest → not Burn Out



Normalize support from:  
Teachers, School Counsellors, Mental Health professionals

Message to reinforce:  
“Needing help means something matters — not that you are weak.”

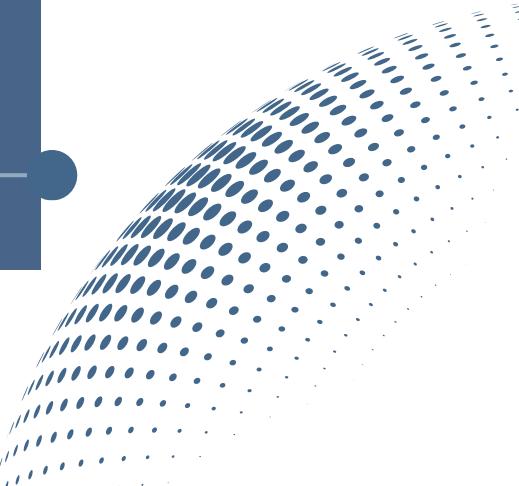


# Key Takeaways for Parents

- Secondary 3 is a developmental training phase
- Emotional fluctuations are to be anticipated
- Supportive relationships serve as a protective factor
- Calm and consistent guidance is essential

Your presence acts as a strong anchor  
With empathy, structure and collaboration, students can learn to face challenges  
and cultivate resilience

Thank you for your partnership with the school





“The **parent-child** connection  
is the most **powerful** mental  
health **intervention** known  
to mankind.”

*-Bessel Van Der Kolk*

# USEFUL RESOURCES

## 01 CREST-YOUTH

Youth mental health assessment and support services (Ministry of Health)

<https://supportgowhere.life.gov.sg/services/CREST-YOUTH/youth-community-outreach-team-crest-youth>

## 02 CHAT (COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT TEAM)

Mental health outreach & online counselling support

<https://www.imh.com.sg/CHAT/Pages/default.aspx>

## 03 YOUTH INTERVENTION TEAMS (YITS)

Provides community-based mental health assessment, therapeutic intervention

<https://supportgowhere.life.gov.sg/services/YIT/youth-integrated-team-yit>

