

**Post-Pandemic Mental Health:
Common Conditions & How to Best Support Our Students**

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A. Mental Health Post-Covid

Quick facts

- 29% of US highschool students reported poor mental health during the pandemic.
- 44% of US highschool students reported feeling sad and hopeless during the past year.
- 25.2% of adolescent females (ages 12-17) and 9.2% of adolescent males in the US had at least one major depressive episode in 2020.
- 20.5% of youth are affected by anxiety worldwide.

Pandemic mental health outcomes

Negative	Positive
Increase in stress, anxiety, depression Sleep difficulties Changes in eating patterns	Time outdoors, new hobbies More time with family and pets Less stressful social interactions Built resilience/new routines

Things to know about the adolescent brain

- The brain continues to mature until mid-to-late 20s.
- Social experiences contribute to brain development.
- The teen brain is adaptable and primed to learn.
- Stress response varies by individual.
- Sleep-deprivation is common.
- Early onset of mental illness.
- Teens are resilient!

Importance of talking about mental health

Conversations about mental health are important because they help build support systems, which are important for strengthening one's ability to cope with stress & adversity, reduce risk of developing mental illness, normalize conversations and reduce stigma around mental health, and encourage recognition of invisible challenges.

Most common mental health conditions

Depression

Symptoms: feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, reduced interest in activities that were previously enjoyable, sleep difficulties, fluctuations in weight, fatigue/low energy, feelings of guilt, difficulty concentrating, suicidal ideation.

Anxiety

Symptoms: excessive worry and anxiety over period of 6 months, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, dizziness, dry mouth, upset stomach, muscle aches, tremors, mind racing, decreased memory/concentration, avoidance.

B. Teacher Support

Importance of teacher support

- Protective factor against mental illness.
- Positive student-teacher relationships impact learning, engagement, and behavior.

How to support students

Accept/Listen non-judgmentally → Respond supportively → Suggest resources → Encourage treatment/additional support → Discuss a plan

Tools for listening with empathy

- Ask questions for clarification
- Ask open-ended questions
- Summarize facts & feelings
- Notice tone of voice & non-verbal cues
- Use minimal prompts
- Be patient
- Avoid giving unhelpful advice
- Do not interrupt
- Avoid confrontation (unless necessary to avoid harm)
- Eye contact
- Sit own alongside or angled

C. Self-Care & Self-Compassion

Teaching strategies for self-care

- Relaxation techniques (deep breathing, progressive relaxation, relaxing yoga poses)
- Gratitude (3 things you did well)
- Visualization (warm sunny day at the beach...)
- Mindfulness (Bring your attention to a body part or sound)

Teaching strategies for self-compassion

- Notice reactions.
- Reframe negative self-talk.
- Share your experience.

D. Resources

Reliable sources of information

- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5)
- National Alliance on Mental Health Illness
- Mental Health America
- Anxiety & Depression Association of America
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Resources

- Anna Freud National Center for Children and Families & Nominet. "Creating a Self-Care Plan: For Young People in Secondary Schools of College." <https://www.annafreud.org/media/15030/my-self-care-plan-secondary.pdf>
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