

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DO

Since many of the challenges young people face are outside of their control, we need a whole-of-society effort to support children’s mental health and wellbeing from birth to adulthood. That said, below are important steps children and young people themselves can take to protect, improve, and advocate for their mental health and that of their family, friends, and neighbors:

- **Remember that mental health challenges are real, common, and treatable.** Struggling with your mental health does not mean you are broken or that you did something wrong. Mental health is shaped by many factors, including biology and life experiences, and there are many ways mental health challenges can be addressed.
- **Ask for help.** Find trusted adults, friends, or family members to talk to about stressful situations. For example, if you or someone you know is being bullied, tell a trusted adult. If you are struggling to manage negative emotions, reach out to a school nurse or counselor, a teacher, a parent or caregiver, a coach, a faith leader, or someone else you look up to and trust. Look into therapy or counseling resources to get support when something causes distress and interferes with your life. Reaching out to others can be hard and takes courage, but it is worth the effort and reminds us we are not alone.
- **Invest in healthy relationships.** Social connection is a powerful buffer to stress and a source of wellbeing. But too often in our fast-paced lives, quality time with people gets crowded out. Make space in your life for the people you love. Spend time with others regularly, in-person and virtually.¹¹⁴ Find people who support and care about you and have open and honest conversations with them about your feelings. Get involved in group activities, such as recreation and outdoor activities, after-school programs, and mentorship programs.¹¹⁵
- **Find ways to serve.** Volunteering in your community and helping others can be a great way to connect with people, build a sense of purpose, and develop your own sense of self-worth.¹¹⁶ Helping others when you are the one struggling can seem counterintuitive. But service is a powerful antidote to isolation, and it reminds us that we have value to add to the world.
- **Learn and practice techniques to manage stress and other difficult emotions.** Try to recognize situations that may be emotionally challenging for you, and come up with strategies to manage those emotions. For example, if you find it stressful to look at COVID-related news, try to check the news less often, take a break for a day or a week at a time, keep notifications off throughout the day, and avoid looking at negative stories before bed.⁵¹

- **Take care of your body and mind.** Stick to a schedule, eat well, stay physically active, get quality sleep, stay hydrated, and spend time outside.^{117, 118, 119} And avoid substances that can ultimately make you feel tired, down, or depressed, such as alcohol, marijuana, vaping, and tobacco.¹²⁰
- **Be intentional about your use of social media, video games, and other technologies.** Here are some questions to help guide your technology use: How much time are you spending online? Is it taking away from healthy offline activities, like exercising, seeing friends, reading, and sleeping? What content are you consuming, and how does it make you feel? Are you online because you want to be, or because you feel like you have to be?
- **Be a source of support for others.** Talk to your family and friends about mental health, listen and be a source of support to them, and connect them to the right resources.¹²¹ Advocate for and contribute your ideas at the local, state, or national levels. For example, look into joining Youth Advisory Councils or mental health peer support programs in your community.¹²²

RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

If you're in crisis, get immediate help: Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, [chat](#) with trained counselors 24/7, or get help in [other ways](#) through the Lifeline

How Right Now (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): Resources for coping with negative emotions and stress, talking to loved ones, and finding inspiration

Youth Engaged 4 Change: Opportunities for youth to make a difference in their lives and in the world around them

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth (National Academies of Medicine): Tools for children, teens, and parents to learn how to cope with challenges

Mental Health Resource Center (JED Foundation): Information about common emotional health issues and how to overcome challenges

Youth Wellbeing Initiatives (National Council for Mental Wellbeing): Collection of initiatives to improve mental wellbeing in youth and young adults

Kids, Teens, and Young Adults (National Alliance on Mental Illness): Resources for young people to get mental health support

One Mind PsyberGuide: A guide to navigating mental health apps and digital technologies

FindTreatment.gov (SAMHSA): Information on substance use and mental health treatment

Trevor Project: Suicide prevention and crisis intervention resources for LGBTQ+ young people

AAKOMA Mental Health Resources (The AAKOMA Project): Resources to support the mental health of youth of color and their caregivers

Mental Health for Immigrants (Informed Immigrant): Tips for managing the mental health of yourself and others