

Tips to Promote Social-Emotional Health Among Teens

What Teens Can Do:

- ✦ When feeling angry, worried or troubled, discuss your feelings with a parent, another trusted adult, or a trusted friend. Teachers and coaches are two examples of adults who can help.
- ✦ Find safe and healthy interests that you enjoy outside of school and home.
- ✦ Write down some goals for the future to help you stay focused on things that really matter. This can help you put day-to-day problems into perspective.
- ✦ Avoid using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; these don't help with problems and often make things worse. Instead, think about positive ways to handle problems and the feelings that go along with them.
- ✦ If you're in trouble with your mood, drug use, or sexuality, get help. You never need to feel alone.

What Parents Can Do:

- ✦ Listen to your teenager—let him talk out his problems with you before jumping in with a solution. Teens need adults to believe in them unconditionally and expect them to succeed.
- ✦ Encourage your teenager to get involved in activities that engage her with the community in a positive way. For some this may be sports or drama, for others it may involve tutoring younger kids or volunteering in the community.
- ✦ Set clear expectations that you want to know where your teen is and when he'll be back. Discuss with him the consequences of the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- ✦ Help your teen to identify other adults to turn to when she wants to talk.
- ✦ Let your high schooler know that it's okay to seek help from a counselor, health care professional, or trusted adult, if needed. Students and parents are encouraged to be aware of the services available at their school and how to access those services.
- ✦ Encourage your teen to explore solutions. In many cases, she will know about the solutions—for example, extra help after school—but may need your encouragement to try them.
- ✦ Everyone experiences anger and stress! Help your teen to find acceptable ways of working through these feelings.



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- ★ Teenagers can be quite impulsive—never let a moment of despair become true tragedy. If your child is depressed or moody, be certain that he cannot access firearms, prescription drugs, or other dangerous items in your home.

What Schools Can Do:

- ★ Schools can help students to feel safe and connected. They can provide meaningful interactions with caring adults on a daily basis and offer engaging after-school opportunities.
- ★ Each student should have a sense of ownership, attachment, responsibility and input into school life. Schools can also help students find opportunities in the community where they can engage in positive roles.
- ★ Some schools provide mental health services on site; others can help students connect with community resources and providers of these services.



What Pediatricians Can Do:

- ★ Talk to high school counselors, parents, and patients to become familiar with the particular stresses and challenges facing teens in your particular community.
- ★ Often doctors are the first people families turn to with mental health concerns. Recognize that the trusting relationship you have with your patients and parents can make you a good first person to talk to. Ask questions during exams about mental health status, and screen for mental health concerns.
- ★ Help your patients and parents focus on the teen's assets or strengths—what she brings to the table to help her survive and thrive in the high school years. For example: goals, sense of self-worth, generosity.
- ★ Know what resources are available in your community so that you can refer teens who need support. Make connections with mental health service providers and referral sources, and have information available in the office about mental health services.

A Final Thought:

As adults, one of the greatest things we can do for our teens is to equip them with a wide repertoire of positive coping strategies. They learn these strategies best when they see them modeled by the important adults in their lives.

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Resources From the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- * Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings
<http://tinyurl.aap.org/pub149111>
www.aap.org/stress
- * Bright Futures
brightfutures.aap.org
- * Children's Mental Health in Primary Care
www.aap.org/mentalhealth
- * Connected Kids
www.aap.org/ConnectedKids
- * Health, Mental Health and Safety Guidelines for Schools
www.nationalguidelines.org
- * HealthyChildren.org
healthychildren.org
- * Sound Advice on Mental Health
www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Sound-Advice-on-Mental-Health.aspx
- * School-based Mental Health Services Policy Statement
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/113/6/1839.full?sid=51bf0768-68f3-4b7d-84bd-e32ffe77a6a9>



This tip sheet was developed for National Children's Mental Health Day. For more information about this event, please visit:
www.samhsa.gov/children

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