

Adolescence: A Critical Window to Influence Youth Mental Health



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It is not enough to focus on youth mental health only at the crisis level—we need to use what we've learned about adolescent cognitive and social development to support young people even earlier.

Policy makers, schools, counselors, and parents should be drawing on the research into adolescent development to support youth wellbeing.

There is ample evidence that these experiences support wellbeing during our adolescent years:

- **Healthy ways to channel their motivation to try new things and explore their world**
Extracurricular activities at schools, special interest clubs and sports, and community-based activities such as volunteering through social-service agencies [that also provide an opportunity to process their experiences](#) can provide healthy outlets for risk taking opportunities.
- **Opportunities to contribute to others**
Contributing to others—either in informal ways, or through volunteering, leadership programs, and community engagement—has been linked to having a greater sense of meaning and purpose, which can [promote better mental health](#), especially for youth from marginalized groups.
- **Healthy relationships with parents and other caring adults**
[Interventions to improve relationships in families](#) have been shown to improve mental health in youth. [Adult mentors](#) can also positively impact the mental health of youth, particularly for adolescents with unstable home environments.
- **Sufficient sleep**
Regular and sufficient sleep is essential to learning and exploration, and is [critical to mental health](#) during adolescence. Later school start times, policies that reduce homework, and family-based interventions such as removing phones at night have all shown promise.

More research is needed

We also need more research into the unique challenges facing the diversity of concerns of adolescents today, including climate anxiety and other issues facing youth in the Global South and in marginalized groups within western countries.

For more information on supporting positive development to promote youth wellbeing, see "[Young people need experiences that boost their mental health](#)," *Nature*, October 13, 2022.