

Early Adolescence: A Window of Opportunity for Educators to Support Positive Mental Health

Research-based recommendations for middle school educators to promote positive mental health

Early adolescence—roughly ages 10 to 13—is a unique time in development. During these first few years of adolescence, young people experience accelerated physical changes related to puberty, rapid brain development, changes in self image, and more intense peer relationships. These changes shape young adolescents in both positive and negative ways and offer opportunities to support youth and promote positive mental health.

Middle school educators can be a crucial first line in promoting each young person’s well-being. Teachers are not mental health professionals, but the time they spend with their students during this pivotal period of development enables them to support positive mental health and prevent mental health challenges from becoming more severe over time.

Recommendations for Educators

Developmental science points to several ways educators can support key aspects of development that are particularly important during early adolescence:

1 Support positive experiences of independence, exploration, and learning.

Educators can provide opportunities for students to take initiative in learning, make decisions, and collaborate with their peers in group work. They can partner with their schools to identify inequities that may limit some students’ participation.

2 Implement strategies to support healthy regulation of emotion and behavior.

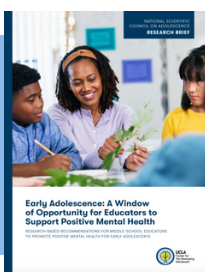
Educators can employ strategies to help their students recognize and manage their emotions and behaviors in the classroom. They can also offer support to navigate emotionally charged relationships with classmates.

3 Encourage youth to build strong relationships.

Educators can be intentional in connecting with their students and can help create a classroom dynamic that can promote learning and contribute to a positive school climate.

4 Implement practices that support healthy sleep.

Educators can incorporate lessons about the importance of sleep and healthy sleep practices and can recognize behaviors such as sleeping in class as an indication that a student needs support.



Read the Full Report, “[Early Adolescence: A Window of Opportunity for Educators to Support Positive Mental Health](#)”

