



UCLA
Center for
the Developing
Adolescent



Supporting Positive Development for Youth Post-Pandemic

Adolescence is a period of remarkable growth and opportunity. But the COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges for this age group.

Following are six key developmental needs of the adolescent years, with suggestions to support these needs as we rethink the ways we work with young people to better support positive development:

1. Adolescents need safe and satisfying ways to take healthy risks and explore the world.

Make room for healthy exploration and create safe spaces to learn from failures, keeping in mind that just “returning to normal” might feel very risky in itself for many young people.

2. Adolescents need real-world scenarios in which to build emotional regulation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Young people had varying experiences during the pandemic, but most experienced some kind of loss, from missed birthdays to a parent’s lost job to the death of a loved one. Help youth navigate, regulate, and direct (not squash!) the complex emotions they may be feeling.

3. Adolescents need avenues to develop a sense of meaning, identity, and purpose by contributing to peers, families, schools, and communities.

One of the best ways to create a sense of belonging and motivation is to include youth as contributing members of the group. Bring young people to the table for decisions about topics like what school and extracurricular activities should look like as we rebuild.

4. Adolescents need positive, attainable ways to earn respect and social status.

Acknowledge, praise, and uplift youths' creativity and the ways in which they have supported one another and their communities during the pandemic and the recent social justice movements.

5. Adolescents need support to develop values, goals, and personal and group identities.

Create space to reflect on questions like: What’s important to me? Who do I want to be? What does it mean to be a member of American society at this moment? What does it mean to be part of the “pandemic generation”?

6. Adolescents need warmth and support from parents and other caring adults.

Make room for a well-paced transition that focuses on the full range of adolescents’ developmental needs, not just “learning loss.”