



Just be there: How to support your teen's mental health

This pandemic has lasted much longer than many of us expected. Despite our best efforts to help teens adapt and stay well, there are still challenges. Some students continue to learn remotely, and others have gone a long time without in-person visits with friends or extended family. In the face of so much disruption, it's natural to worry about how your teen is holding up.

When it comes to mental health, the day-to-day relationship you maintain with your teen matters. Your presence and support nurtures their well-being and helps them cope with life's

ups-and-downs. You also know them better than anyone else does, so you play a key role in noticing and responding to problems.

As the pandemic carries on, here are some tips to help you be there for your teen.

Check in

Every day, take a few moments to check in. Ask your teen how they've been doing and what they've been up to. Encourage them to share their thoughts, feelings, and challenges. Be honest about how things are going with you—this can help open up

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and normalize conversations around mental health.

Checking in with your teen can feel more natural while you're doing an activity together, like eating a meal, driving, or walking the dog. If it seems like they just aren't comfortable opening up with you, help them identify a trusted adult they can turn to if they need help, like a teacher, coach, grandparent, Elder, or faith leader.

Reassure your teen that you're there for them, no matter what. Give them your full attention—really listen to what they say. It's okay for your teen to feel sad, mad, or upset about something. You may not agree or understand, or it may seem silly to you, but their difficulties are real to them. Try not to judge. Instead, show empathy and compassion.

Surround them with calm, warmth, and safety

As much as you can, provide a positive home environment that nurtures healthy growth and development, and builds their independence. Here are some things you can do:

- Love and accept them
- Encourage and support their interests, efforts, strengths, and passions
- Try not to solve their problems for them; instead, help brainstorm solutions
- Listen to their opinions and give them an active role in making decisions
- Work together to set healthy routines for getting school work done and for things like staying active, eating well, and getting enough sleep

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- Set boundaries and stick to them—just be open to negotiating as your teen matures
- Help them break big tasks into smaller, more achievable goals
- Encourage and model unplugging from technology, especially for meals, homework, and sleep

Help them understand and manage stress

Teach your teen that stress is a natural response to challenging situations. Help them figure out what stress looks and feels like for them—for example, they might feel nervous, shaky, or nauseous.

Recognizing stress is the first step in handling it. Learn more with this handy [4-minute video](#) and encourage your teen to explore different ways of coping. Role model the techniques that work well for you, and give them opportunities to learn and practice what works for them. Some common techniques are:

- Breathing exercises
- Physical activity, like running, dancing, or stretching
- Calming activities like yoga, mindfulness, art or music
- Spending time in nature

For more information about mental health, visit:

- [Stress in children and teenagers](#)
- [MentalHealthLiteracy.org](https://www.mentalhealthliteracy.org)

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Be proactive about mental health

You know your teen best. If you have concerns about the way they are thinking, feeling, or acting, it's a good idea to get help. Identifying concerns early and responding to them can prevent future problems, and can make things easier for both you and your teen.

If your teen is experiencing distress that's intense, long lasting, or causing problems in daily life, there are caring professionals and programs that can help. Many are low-cost or free.

- Your family physician can be a great first point of contact. Ask them about local options, like psychologists, social workers, support groups, or community organizations.
 - Your teen's teachers may be able to help. Ask about supports for mental health at school, like counsellors, success coaches, or child and youth specialists. Many schools also offer mentoring groups or peer support networks.
- You can visit ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes for a directory of supports for handling financial pressures, unexpected challenges, and stressful situations.
 - You can call **811** to speak with a registered nurse, any time of day or night.
 - Your teen can visit jack.org/abhub for online resources to help them care for themselves and look out for others.
 - Your teen can contact Kids Help Phone any time, to talk about anything:
 - By phone: **1-800-668-6868**
 - By text: Text **CONNECT** to **686868**
 - Through Facebook Messenger:
Visit KidsHelpPhone.ca/Messenger

If your teen is talking about suicide or has engaged in suicidal behaviour, don't leave them alone. Call **811** for support. If anyone is in immediate danger, call **911**.