



Supporting the Emotional Health of Your Adolescent

Recognizing Signs of Serious Problems

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LVHN.org/children 888-402-LVHN



Objectives

- Understand the factors that impact adolescent mental health
- Discuss ways to engage and support adolescents
- Review common mental health issues in adolescence
- Identify the red flags that indicate a serious problem
- Learn the steps to take for more help

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Developmental Growth

Stress is a part of growth



Children

- Conforming to the demands of school
- Comparing self to others
- Sitting still
- Managing bodily demands



Tweens/young adolescents

- Hormones and puberty
- Growth and body type
- Personal appearance
- Fitting in

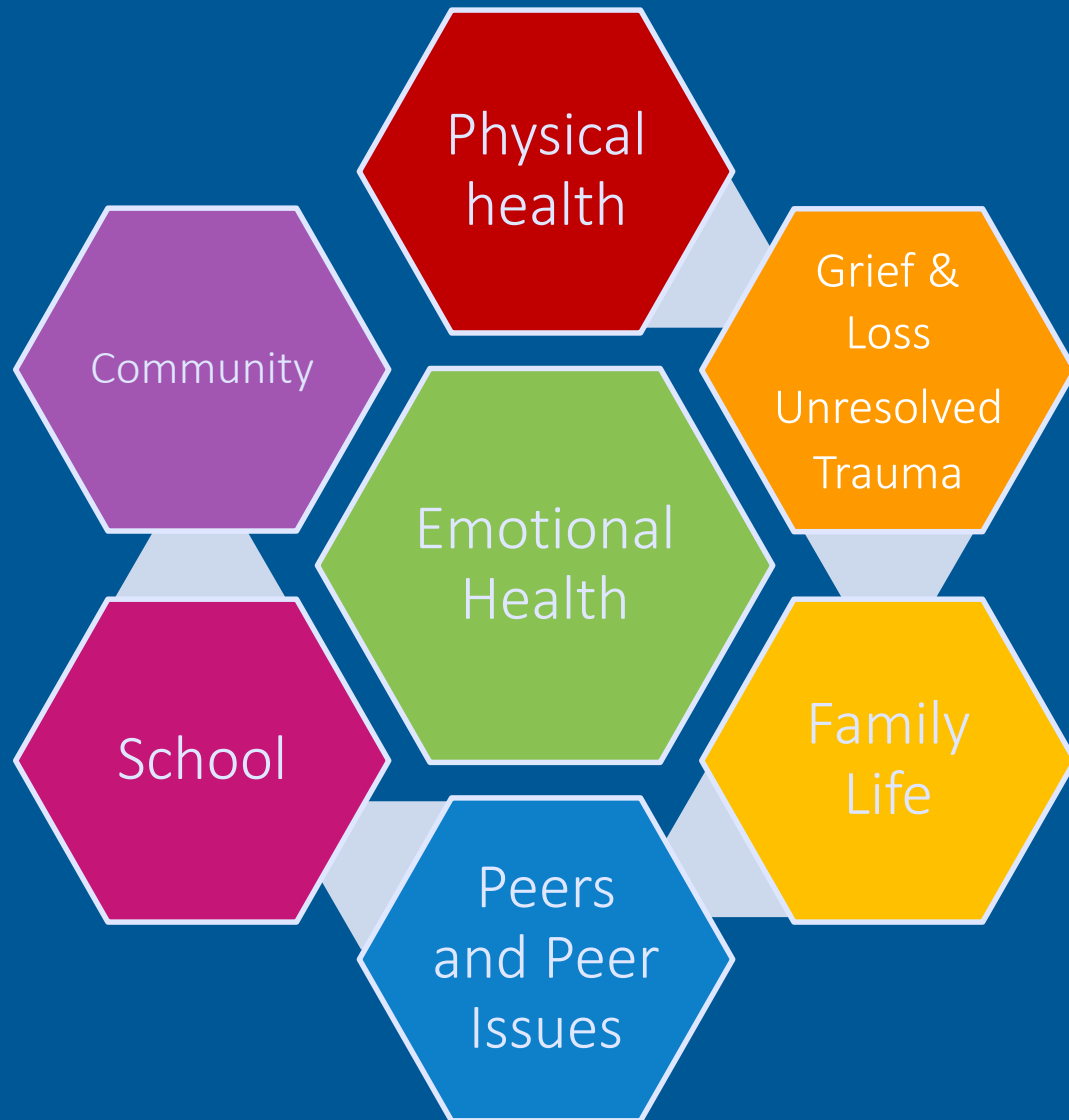


Older adolescents/young adults

- Adjustment to the demands of school and work
- Independence and separation from family
- Uncertainty about future

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What impacts emotional health?



- Stressors can accumulate
- Stressors may cause behaviors that **mimic** mental illness
- If there is an existing mental illness **stressors can make things worse**

★ Support can help! ★

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Supporting Your Adolescent



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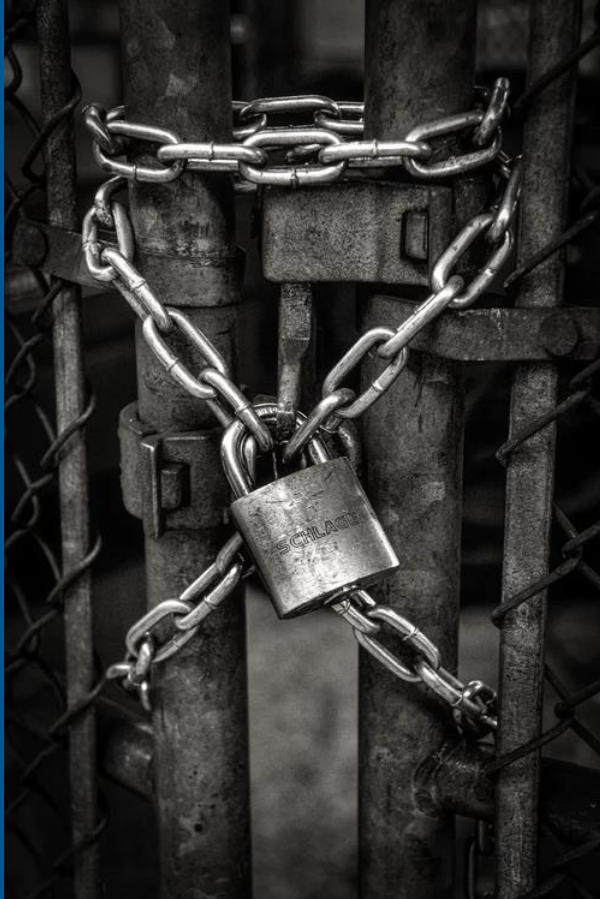
Open the door for dialogue...

- Validate feelings
- Ask open-ended questions
- (Try to) listen openly and actively
- Problem solve together and build problem-solving skills
- Recognize communication styles
- Discuss stressors in age-appropriate ways and model open communication
- Set **clear** and **consistent expectations**
 - Knowing = safety
 - Model taking accountability
- Encourage healthy coping skills, model good self-care



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Habits that shut dialogue down...



- Talking when emotions are high
- Judgement
- Not validating feelings
- Not offering time to process

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If you are not mindful of your own emotions,
you may mirror the stress of your child.

This escalates the situation.

Remember that you set the
temperature of the room.



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The need for more help...

Use open and honest communication

- The decision for pursuing help is made from love and concern, not the desire to punish or control
- Support is protection for your child, even this means protection from their own unsafe decisions

You are the caregiver for your child. Act if you are concerned.

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Mental Health Issues in Adolescence

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Adjustment Disorder

- A strong, long-lasting reaction to an upsetting event (divorce, a death, moving to a new home, starting a different school, a break up, or a big life disappointment)
- Reaction to an event of great importance to the child — whether or not that event appears significant to others
- Hard time coping with emotions, many possible responses—depression/anxiety, hostility, fighting, or refusal to go to school

Anxiety Disorders

- More than just worry, this real disorder affects how the brain functions
- Persistent, irrational, and overwhelming worry, fear, and anxiety that interferes with daily activities
- **Irritability**, sleeplessness, jitteriness or **physical symptoms** such as headaches and stomachaches

Mood Disorders

- Includes all type of depression and bipolar disorder, more intense than normal feelings of sadness
- Chemicals in the brain that regulate mood are imbalanced, can be worse when paired with difficult life events or chronic stress
- Trouble with school performance, persistent sadness, anger, hostility or rebellion, extreme guilt, low self-esteem, difficulty in relationships with family or friends, suicidal thoughts and actions

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Inattention or being distracted, hyperactivity and impulsivity, or both
- Disrupts life in multiple settings
- Easily distracted, always forgetting, trouble following instructions, easily frustrated with tasks, trouble sitting still, doing quiet things, talking too much, interrupting/trouble taking turns

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Eating Disorders

- Anyone can have an eating disorder, you cannot tell just by looking, this disorder does not only affect women
- Includes anorexia (restricted eating), bulimia (purging food) and bingeing (overeating food), *orthorexia* (not a DSM diagnosis, a fixation on “healthy eating” that causes damage to health)
- Distorted view of body, secrecy in eating habits, hiding food or throwing it away, making excuses not to eat, compulsive exercising, mood changes, weight loss

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Substance Use Disorder

- Alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, opioids, prescription drug abuse, others
- May increase other risk behaviors like unprotected sex, dangerous driving
- Alcohol, smoke, or other chemical odors on breath or clothing, signs of intoxication or strange behavior, changes in mood, change in friend group

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Spectrum disorder, different depending on the person and level of functioning- unique strengths and challenges
- May appear to “get worse” in adolescence due to the challenges of adolescence
- Struggle with additional demands on planning, organization and other executive skills, lack of understanding of puberty and sexual development, may not understand importance of grooming to social acceptance, may escape from social interaction through favorite topic, highlight ways to connect with others

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Psychotic Disorders

- Can be triggered by stress, drug or alcohol use, injury or illness, or appear on their own
- Thinking and emotions are so impaired, they indicate that the person experiencing them has lost contact with reality, sometimes mood disorders can include experience of psychotic symptoms
- Suspiciousness, erratic speech, loss of motivation, withdrawal, false thoughts (delusions) and/or see or hear things that are not there (hallucinations)



Signs to Get More Help: **Red Flag Behaviors**

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Consider impact on daily life...


- Personal health and safety issues?
- Safety and health concerns to family members or others?
- Significant impact on school performance and behavior?
- Withdrawal from peer relationships and activities of enjoyment?
- Trouble behavior in the community (destruction of property, getting in trouble with the law)?

These are **signs that more help is needed**

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Red Flags

- Physical complaints (headache, stomachache)
- Trouble concentrating
- *Extreme* mood changes and intense feelings
- Behavioral changes- getting in trouble at school, fighting, property destruction, making threats
- Excessive or lack of sleep/ eating
- Weight loss
- Drug or alcohol use
- Self-injury
- Isolating from family and friends
- Loss of interest in favorite things/activities
- Giving away possessions
- Suicidal thoughts or actions

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- When did this start?
 - How many “flags” do you see?
 - Is there a trigger event?
 - How intense?
 - How long does it last?

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If you are still unsure...

- Signs that something serious is happening will not usually resolve without intervention/support
- If you sense that something is wrong, but you aren't able to say exactly what it is that's okay. Get help.
- If your child tells you- verbally or non-verbally (through behavior), address it
- Remember there is no penalty for seeking support

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Suicidal Thoughts

- Ask openly
- Show genuine concern, listen non-judgmentally
- Stay with them, do not leave them alone
- Restrict access to dangerous objects, means
- Get help right away

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Support Services

Student Assistance Program (DHH Lengel SAP Team)

- A team made up of school and agency staff available to help you access school and community services for your child
- Provides parents and caregivers with information on choices available
- Parents and caregivers are active members of the team
- Anyone can refer a child, including family members, friends, teachers and other school personnel, and anyone can let the team know that they are worried about someone
- Contact your child's school and ask to speak with the SAP team

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What support can services provide?

- Evaluation- a professional will speak with your child, with you, others, to get the whole picture
- Therapy- individual, family or group
- Behavioral interventions
- Medication management
- Higher levels of care- acute partial programs, services in the home, inpatient stays
- Do not feel discouraged if help is required again in the future- sometimes there are bumps in the road

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Questions

Thank you for your time!

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