

# INTRODUCTION

Thank you for downloading Mental Health America's 2022 Back-to-School Toolkit.

If you are reading this, then you probably have a vested interest in the nation's children as they start another school year. As we continue living with the lingering pandemic, gun violence, and social unrest – all of which unfairly and disproportionately affect BIPOC communities – it is imperative to remember that our youth are also dealing with the intense influences and emotions of growing up in a rapidly changing digital age, which we do not fully understand.

Now, more than ever, school-age children need our support, and MHA remains committed to this undertaking. Early-in-life experiences, including adverse experiences and trauma, shape a person's future. Knowing and addressing the early signs of mental health conditions – and understanding the roots of resilience and positive coping – can increase the chances for well-being, recovery, and positive outcomes. In this toolkit, we hope you find ways to interrupt negative feelings and behaviors and promote positive life skills for mental health.

MHA created each of these resources for both the adult – parent, caregiver, teacher, coach, school administrator – and the child. While some of these topics span generations of common experiences, such as a hard home life, losing someone, or fitting in with peers, others, such as dealing with the pressures and temptations of social media, are new to our younger cohorts. In this toolkit, we delve into a variety of feelings and behaviors and offer suggestions to help young people thrive.

One of the easiest ways to help a child is to validate that their emotions are real and that they are worthy of our respect and attention. MHA assembled these resources with empathy for all children and caregivers, without judgment or criticism, but with compassion and hope.

Children look to the adults in their lives for cues on how to react and deal with tough events. If you are an adult caregiver, remember to take care of your emotional health, too, and seek help or guidance when things are overwhelming.

We thank you for your commitment to the mental health of all youth.



*Schroeder Stribling*

Schroeder Stribling, President & CEO  
Mental Health America

This year's toolkit includes:

Key Messages

Drop-in Article

Social Media Post Samples and Images

Virtual Events

Resource List

Handouts for Adults

Handouts for Kids and Teens

Worksheet for Kids and Teens

Posters

Social Media Cheat Sheet Infographic

## QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about the toolkit, please contact Danielle Fritze, Vice President of Public Education and Design, at [dfritze@mhanational.org](mailto:dfritze@mhanational.org).

# KEY MESSAGES

- A difficult home life, losing someone, or trouble fitting in with peers can have a profound impact on a young person's mental health.
- Children and teens are dealing with the intense emotions of growing up in a digital age.
- Young people are facing challenges that even adults aren't sure how to handle, like the lingering pandemic, gun violence, and social unrest.
- Many students will exhibit symptoms of depression and anxiety as they return to the classroom, and it is important to let kids and teens know that support is available.
- Knowing and addressing early signs of mental health conditions can increase the chances of recovery and positive outcomes.
- One of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition is to take an anonymous screen at [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org).
- Mental Health America (MHA) has online screening tools, including one that is youth-focused and one for parents. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.
- MHA has developed its 2022 Back-to-School Toolkit to help increase understanding of the issues affecting the mental health of children and teens and is providing materials on these topics for parents, school personnel, and young people.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with language from the fact sheets and other materials included in this toolkit.

## SCREENING STATS

- During the first half of 2022, 82% (N=662,823) of screeners under 18 from the U.S. screened at risk for a mental health condition.
- In June 2022, 56% (N= 3,850) 11-13 year olds who took a depression screen in the U.S. reported experiencing frequent suicidal ideation, which was the highest rate of any age group.

# DROP-IN ARTICLE

Use this article in your next e-blast or share with your local schools to include in their next newsletter.



By now, most of us have read or seen stories on the youth mental health crisis plaguing our country. From an ongoing pandemic, lack of in-person social interactions, social upheaval, and more, kids and teens are facing once-in-a-lifetime events that even adults aren't sure how to handle.

Adolescence is already a confusing time without the added fears concerning safety in schools, staying healthy, family financial security, and loss of loved ones – so we shouldn't be surprised that the rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, and other mental health conditions are on the rise.

Mental Health America recognizes with their new [Back-to-School Toolkit](#) that our youth are having “All the Feels” as they enter the new school year. These resources look at the issues young people face that are having an impact on their mental health and offer tips on how to deal with them and the resulting emotions. The MHA toolkit can also help parents and school personnel better understand the issues, such as the effects of social media on youth mental health and how to be supportive.

Many students will exhibit symptoms of depression and anxiety as they return to the classroom, and it is important to let kids and teens know that support is available. Familiarize yourself with the school's education and counseling services, local mental health organizations, and community resources that can make a child feel more secure – like food, clothing, and school supply assistance.

Free, confidential, anonymous screening tools are available at [MHAScreening.org](#) for youth and parents who are concerned about mental health. After taking the screen, results are provided along with tips for next steps and additional information.

Serious signs that someone is in crisis and needs help, such as thoughts or plans of hurting oneself or another person, should be addressed promptly. If you think a child or teen is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. Its trained crisis counselors can help you find local resources or suggest next steps.

# SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

## GENERAL

- Young people are facing challenges that even adults aren't sure how to handle. Mental Health America's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit provides resources for students feeling #AllTheFeels, as well as parents and school personnel. Learn more: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school)
- Many students are feeling #AllTheFeels as they return to the classroom. MHA's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit examines the mental health challenges young people face and provides resources for students, parents, and school personnel. Learn more: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school)
- Adolescence is a confusing, often challenging time. Mental Health America's latest toolkit provides essential #Back2School resources for parents and school personnel to help support their students: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school)
- Adolescence is a confusing, often challenging time. Mental Health America's latest toolkit provides essential #Back2School resources for parents and school personnel to help support students as they navigate #AllTheFeels. Learn more: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school)
- Many students will show signs of anxiety, depression, and #AllTheFeels as they return to the classroom. It's important for parents and school personnel to know how to support. For free resources, check out MHA's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school)

## SCREENING AND CRISIS

- Whether you're a student, parent, or school personnel, it's normal to feel some anxiety around going #Back2School—but if your anxiety is severely impacting your well-being, consider taking a free, confidential mental health test at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) #B2S2022
- Taking a mental health test is one of the quickest and easiest ways for students, parents, and school personnel to check in on their mental health as they head #Back2School. Get started at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) #B2S2022
- Many of us are experiencing #AllTheFeels as we begin a new school year. Whether you're a student, parent, or school personnel, it's important to check in on your mental health. Take a free, confidential screening at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) #Back2School #B2S2022
- Serious signs that a student is in crisis should be addressed immediately. If you believe your child or student is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988 or chat [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also text MHA to 741741. #Back2School #B2S2022
- The ongoing youth mental health crisis should concern us all. If you believe your child or student is experiencing a mental health crisis, support is available. Call or text 988 or chat [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also text MHA to 741741. #Back2School #B2S2022

## FACT SHEET TOPICS AND STATISTICS

- In the first 15 months of COVID-19, 140,000+ children in the U.S. lost a caregiver. Mental Health America's #Back2School Toolkit includes resources for students navigating loss and grief as they begin a new school year. Learn more: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #B2S2022
- Today's students have experienced tremendous loss through COVID-19, mass shootings, and increased rates of suicide. Learn more from Mental Health America about what parents and school personnel can do to support them: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #Back2School #B2S2022
- Everyone feels awkward, insecure, or alone at times—especially during adolescence. If you're a student struggling to "fit in," check out these resources for improving your self-esteem and building a community: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #Back2School #B2S2022

- Most adults remember how tough middle and high school can be. Help your child or student improve their self-esteem and build a community by using Mental Health America's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #B2S2022
- For some students, school can be a relief from a difficult home life. Learn more from Mental Health America about the challenges some students face at home and how to make them feel safe and supported in the classroom: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #Back2School #B2S2022
- Some students face serious challenges at home. That's why it's so important for them to feel safe and supported in the classroom. For resources, download Mental Health America's #Back2School Toolkit: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #B2S2022
- Does your child or student have an unhealthy relationship with social media? Download MHA's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit to learn more about how parents and school personnel can help promote healthy social media habits: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #B2S2022
- 45% of teenagers say they're online "almost constantly." Whether you're a student, parent, or school personnel, it's important to understand the pros and cons of using social media. Learn more in MHA's 2022 #Back2School Toolkit: [mhanational.org/back2school](https://mhanational.org/back2school) #B2S2022

## HASHTAGS

### Best practices:

- For Facebook and Twitter, use no more than one or two strategic hashtags per post.
- For Instagram use at least 10 hashtags per post.

### Here are our suggested hashtags for this year's Back-to-School campaign:

- #Back2School
- #B2S2022
- #AllTheFeels

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## 24/7 TOOLS

**MHA Screening:** Online screening is one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine if you're experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition. Our screens are free, confidential, and scientifically-validated.

**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support to people in distress – you don't need to be suicidal to reach out. Call 1-800-273-8255 to be connected with a crisis counselor. Crisis counselors who speak Spanish are available at 1-888-628-9454.

**988 Textline:** When you text 988, you will complete a short survey letting the crisis counselor know a little about your situation. You will be connected with a trained crisis counselor in a crisis center who will answer the text, provide support, and share resources if needed.

**Crisis Text Line:** If you prefer texting to talking on the phone, text MHA to 741-741 to be connected with a crisis counselor who will help you get through your big emotions.

**Domestic Violence Hotline:** If you're experiencing domestic violence, looking for resources or information, or are question unhealthy aspects of your relationship, call 1-800-799-7233 or go to their site to virtually chat with an advocate.

**Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline:** If you or a child you know is being hurt or doesn't feel safe at home, you can call or text 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) or [start an online chat](#) to reach a crisis counselor. They can help you figure out next steps to work through what is happening and stay safe.

**The Trevor Project:** The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to youth in crisis, feeling suicidal, or in need of a safe and judgment-free person to talk to. Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or [start an online chat](#).

## MHA RESOURCES

### **Addressing the Youth Mental Health Crisis: The Urgent Need for More Education, Services, and Supports**

Indicators of youth mental health and well-being indicate a growing public health crisis that has only been worsened by COVID-19. Yet, public policy has been slow to respond. This report is designed to guide advocacy at the state level and begin to create a framework for federal policy. The report aims to document the alarming trends in youth mental health and the disparities in access to care; address several innovative state legislative solutions to promote school-based mental health education, supports, and services; and highlight the effect of these policies on advancing equity and the role of youth leadership in securing legislation. Visit [MHA's website](#) to access the report.

### **Back-to-School Toolkits**

An archive of Back-to-School toolkits (like this one) from previous years can be found on [MHA's website](#). Some materials are also available in Spanish.

### **Screening in Schools**

Providing mental health screenings in schools is one of the best ways to catch mental health problems when and where they are likeliest to arise. Fifty percent of individuals who struggle with a mental health condition will show symptoms during their adolescent years. Childhood brain development research indicates that puberty is especially an important time for monitoring the onset of mental illnesses, including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. This period is when individuals are most vulnerable to poor outcomes, but also where intervention has the best chance for building resiliency and change.

Mental health screenings can be implemented in schools through sharing resources with students on school posters or handouts at the nurse's office, by providing screenings and education in health or physical education classes, or as part of a extensive mental health screening and education protocol. MHA Screening is a free program designed to support schools in any district, across various levels of investment. Learn how to get started at [screening.mhanational.org/mental-health-screening-in-schools](#).

## State of Mental Health in America Report 2022

The State of Mental Health in America report is intended to provide up-to-date data and information about disparities faced by individuals with mental health challenges and serve as a tool for change. Learn more about disparities in mental health treatment for youth of color by downloading the report at <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>. A new report will be released in October 2022.

### MHA Webinars:

- [Back To "Normal" – Or Not: How to Help Your Family Through COVID-19 Transitions](#)
- [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Crisis Services](#)
- [Navigating Trauma For Kids & Teens: Back-to-School & COVID-19](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Our Communities](#)
- [Teachers & Families: Coping With Back-to-School Stress](#)
- [Trauma Informed Practices in Schools: Understanding Racial Trauma and Cultivating Wellness](#)
- [Young Mental Health Leaders Series: Peer Support and Youth Mental Health](#)

### MHA Webpages:

- [Bereavement and Grief](#)
- [Healthy Mental and Emotional Development](#)
- [Helping Children Cope With Loss](#)
- [Helping Children Cope With Tragedy-Related Anxiety](#)
- [Recognizing Mental Health Problems in Children](#)
- [Talking to Adolescents and Teens: Starting The Conversation](#)
- [Talking to Adolescents and Teens: What To Do And Where To Go](#)
- [Time to Talk: Talking to Your Parents](#)
- [What Every Child Needs for Good Mental Health](#)
- [When Home Life Is Hard: Understanding Abuse](#)
- [Youth Information and Support](#)
- [Youth Mental Health](#)

## MHA PARTNERS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The **AAKOMA Project** builds the consciousness of youth of color and their caregivers on the recognition and importance of mental health, empowers youth and their families to seek help and manage mental health, and influences systems and services to receive and address the needs of youth of color and their families. Learn more at <https://www.aakomaproject.org>.

**Brightline** is reinventing behavioral health care for children and families, bringing together innovative technology, virtual behavioral health services, and an integrated care team focused on supporting children across developmental stages and their families. Brightline is headquartered in Palo Alto, CA and expanding quickly to support families across the country. Learn more at <https://www.hellobrightline.com>.

The **Cook Center for Human Connection** brings together the best organizations, programs, and products to prevent suicide, provide mental health support, and enhance human connections essential for people to thrive. The Cook Center has created My Life is Worth Living, an educational animated series that includes five powerful stories told over 20 episodes. In each episode, relatable teen characters wrestle with challenges that are all too familiar for many viewers and discover strategies to cope when it feels like their own thoughts are against them. Learn more at [mylifeisworthliving.org](http://mylifeisworthliving.org). The Cook Center has also created [parentguidance.org](http://parentguidance.org), a free resource that helps parents find answers to help their child(ren). Its content is led by therapists who provide trusted and specialized courses, professional support, and a safe community of parents helping each other. It includes a free "ask a therapist" feature.

**Effective School Solutions** is working to reinvent K-12 mental health care by partnering with districts to help them implement culturally inclusive mental health and behavioral support programs. These programs have been proven to improve care, strengthen academics, address trauma, and maintain students in-district. Learn more at <https://www.effectiveschoolsolutions.com/about>.

**Minding Your Mind** creates experiences that open minds and show people they are not alone when they are struggling. Its group of young adult speakers, who have successfully and productively coped with their mental health challenges, share their stories of hope, recovery, and resilience. They use the power of storytelling to provide evidence-based education about mental health challenges in schools, communities, and workplaces. Minding Your Mind encourages youth to seek help and ensures that those around them are effectively prepared to provide that help. Learn more at <https://www.mindingyourmind.org>.

The **National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA)** is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders. NEDA supports individual families and youth affected by eating disorders. NEDA also has specific content and resources for parents and caregivers on how to help support loved ones through eating disorders. Learn more at <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog-tags/parents-caregivers>.

The **National School Boards Association (NSBA)** is a federation of state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands that represent locally elected school board officials, serving approximately 51 million public school students. Working with and through state association members, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. Learn more at <https://www.nsba.org>.

**Teen Talk App** is a free, anonymous, safe space for teens to request support from trained peers and learn from others with similar experiences. The app is a safe and anonymous space where teens can freely speak to their peers about everyday issues and their overall mental health. Teen Advisors are trained to support their peers through a wide range of experiences, including anxiety, depression, relationships, family issues, school, and more. Teen Advisors are supervised by licensed mental health professionals. Learn more at <https://www.teentalkapp.com>.

# MHA AFFILIATE SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

## CALIFORNIA – [Mental Wellness Center](#)

**Mental Health Matters** is a program that teaches basic facts about mental health to middle and high school students, including symptoms and warning signs, specific mental health conditions, understanding that mental health conditions are treatable, and understanding that mental health conditions can happen to anyone – even children and adolescents. The class reduces stigma and ignorance and allows students to practice wellness skills. Mental health conditions discussed include thought disorders like schizophrenia, clinical depression, bipolar diagnoses, anxiety and panic, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

**The Wellness Connection** is a high school leadership program that educates, empowers, and engages students. Students raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health by promoting self-care, connection, kindness, education, prevention, and outreach amongst their peers.

**Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHA)** is designed for adults who regularly interact with young people – either in a personal or professional capacity. It is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help those 12-18 who may be experiencing a mental health or addiction challenge or who is in crisis. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a five-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

**Teen Mental Health First Aid (tmHFA)** is an evidence-based course that teaches teenagers the skills they need to recognize and help their friends with potential mental health and substance use problems and crises and how to get the help of an appropriate adult. The course is designed to be delivered in high schools or other community sites by a trained teen Mental Health First Aid Instructor in three interactive classroom sessions of 75 minutes each or five sessions of 45 minutes each on non-consecutive days.

## FLORIDA – [MHA of Southeast Florida](#)

**I'm Thumbody** is a one-hour self-esteem program for second grade students. Children learn to respect themselves, respect others, be responsible for their attitudes/actions, and where to go for safe help. These concepts are also helpful for bullying prevention. The classroom presentation introduces the concept of good mental health and discusses the positive value of differences. Second graders learn to change negative thoughts to positive ones to feel good about themselves and that it's good to talk about feelings and ways to manage their anger.

**Listen to Children** is a mentoring program for elementary students. The premise is that children benefit from an ongoing supportive relationship with a caring, non-judgmental friend who is not an "authority figure." The listener can help children relax and receive extra positive attention in their busy lives. Parents or caretakers must sign consent for the child to participate. Teachers, school counselors, or parents identify students projected to benefit from this prevention program and is not recommended for children with severe behavioral issues.

**Thumbody, Too** is a 45-minute kindergarten classroom presentation, which is a prequel to the second grade version. A puppet resembling a thumb teaches the children they are very special, and everyone has different fingerprints. Themes include respect and responsibility. Kids love the puppet and they also enjoy the songs, the coloring activity, and doing their thumbprints. The students learn that it's good to talk about their feelings (happy, sad, scared and mad) – even though some things might be difficult for them. They also learn some appropriate things to do when they are angry and what to do if they get separated from their adult in a big store.

## INDIANA – [MHA of West Central Indiana](#)

**INDEPTH and N-O-T** are two programs offered by MHA of West Central Indiana to address tobacco use. The American Lung Association's INDEPTH program is available to middle and high school students in the school setting as an alternative to suspension for tobacco and nicotine infractions. Teens then have an opportunity to attend Not On Tobacco, a 10-week tobacco and nicotine cessation program for teens.

**Lost and Found Suicide Prevention Coalition** brings awareness and education of suicide prevention to the community. We recognize that help starts with one single act of kindness. The Lost and Found Suicide Prevention Coalition hosts Kindness Rock painting events throughout the Wabash Valley to help spread awareness and education about suicide prevention.

**The No Fear Future Club** program provides young people opportunities to learn more about themselves through service to others. Club members gain an understanding of the important role each individual plays in the community as they organize various service-learning projects. This club provides students the opportunity to be young leaders within their schools, teaching their peers about the importance of giving back and standing up against important social issues, such as bullying, suicide prevention, and staying drug and alcohol free.

**Too Good for Drugs and Violence (TGFD)** is a program for elementary and middle school students focused on developing personal and interpersonal skills to resist peer pressures and make healthy choices. TGFD includes an emphasis on goal setting, decision-making, bonding with others, having respect for self and others, managing emotions, and effective communication. The program also provides information about the negative consequences of drug use and the benefits of a nonviolent, drug-free lifestyle.

## KANSAS – [MHA of South Central Kansas](#)

**Pathways** is the oldest substance abuse prevention support program in Sedgwick County serving children ages 11 – 18 that are at risk of using drugs and/or alcohol. Pathways utilizes Life Skills Training, a research-based curriculum proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. The eighth through twelfth grade session program focuses on drug education and awareness, prevention, self-esteem, peer pressure and anger management. Pathways encourages students to seek healthy alternatives to using drugs. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or after school.

The **PATHS for Kids** program utilizes Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) which is an evidence-based curriculum for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and acting out behaviors in elementary school students, ages 5-11. PATHS curriculum covers five areas of social and emotional development including self-control, emotional understanding, self-esteem, peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. PATHS for Kids groups meet for 10-12 weeks and are available for classroom settings, during lunch or after school.

The **Teen Outreach Girl Empower Program (GEP)** is a structured, gender-specific support group for girls ages 9-18. GEP targets girls at risk for juvenile delinquency, school suspension/expulsion, alcohol/substance abuse, and/or school performance failure. GEP utilizes Girl Circle, a research-based curriculum which aims to counteract social and interpersonal forces that impede girls' growth and development by promoting an emotionally safe setting and structure within which girls can develop caring relationships and use authentic voices. GEP is comprised of groups which meet for 12-15 sessions, that focus on topics including bullying, emotional self-care, shoplifting, healthy relationships, body image, and friendship. GEP groups are held at area schools and community centers at prearranged times. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or after school.

The **Boys 2 Men Empowerment Project (B2M)** is a gender specific program targeted to boys between the ages of 12-18 at risk for juvenile delinquency, school suspension/expulsion, alcohol/substance abuse, and/or school performance failure. B2M utilizes Boys Council, a research-based curriculum that promotes boys' and young men's safe, strong, and healthy passage through preteen and adolescent years. B2M is comprised of groups which meet for 12-15 sessions, that focus on topics including roles and expectations, bullying, put-downs, respect, power, and emotions. B2M groups are held at area schools and community centers at prearranged times. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or after school.

## MASSACHUSETTS - [Massachusetts Association for Mental Health](#)

The Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH) has curated **mental health education resources** for students and families on its website (<https://www.mamh.org/education/mhed-resources>). Understanding and maintaining your mental health is a lifelong process that is essential to health and well-being. The webpage includes videos, articles, activities, apps, and more to empower students K-12 to take charge of their own mental health. Resources are organized by grade level (K-4, 5-8, 9-12).

**Network of Care Massachusetts** is an online tool (<https://massachusetts.networkofcare.org>) that helps users find information about resources in their communities for people of all ages with mental health and substance use needs. Key features include:

- A searchable – by keyword and ZIP code – service directory of over 5,200 listings of mental health, substance use, and related social services programs and organizations across the state.
- Information on how to navigate program eligibility requirements across state agencies.
- Information on how to apply for and maintain health insurance coverage.
- An extensive library of health information, including more than 30,000 high-quality articles, fact sheets, and interactive tools written by leading experts and organizations in their fields.

Network of Care Massachusetts is designed to serve individuals at risk for or living with mental health and/or substance use conditions, their families and friends, care coordinators, district and school staff, and other staff at provider organizations and state agencies. In March 2021, the Culturally Responsive Behavioral Health Resource Hub was added to the site. This hub contains information on online support groups, local and national organizations, therapist directories, culturally-responsive clinics and programs, and wellness resources for Black, Latinx, Asian, and other people of color. Finding a provider, support group, or community space where individuals feel safe and supported is extremely important to mental health and well-being.

## MINNESOTA - [Mental Health Minnesota](#)

**We Can RELATE** provides free, anonymous, online peer support for teens and young adults. Trained volunteers are young adults (age 18-25) who have also faced mental health concerns and can “RELATE” to what students are going through.

## NEW YORK – [MHA in New York State](#)

**Mental Health and Wellness 101 for Students** combines lecture and experiential learning activities. Topics include understanding mental health along a continuum from wellness to illness; self-care and other wellness strategies; recovery and treatment-seeking behavior; and anti-stigma messaging.

**Mental Health and Wellness 101 for Educators** includes a one-hour training on mental health and wellness, with additional 30-minute training components that can be tailored to specific needs (i.e. suicide prevention, trauma, school-based wellness initiatives).

The **School Mental Health Resource & Training Center** is an online, self-directed module for school personnel. Participants can leave and return to the course as necessary. Audio and video are part of the course. To obtain the certificate, participants must take a test.

**Youth Mental Health First Aid** is a course that introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a five-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

## NEW YORK – [MHA of Western New York](#)

**BEST: Basic Emotional Skills Training** is an evidence-based classroom program that helps students in pre-K through second grade develop the healthy social and emotional skills they need to succeed in school and life.

## NEW YORK – [MHA of Columbia-Greene Counties](#)

The **Advantage After School Program** provides educational support, recreational opportunities, skill-building, character education, and a nutritional snack. It is three hours of interesting and engaging structured daily activities. Collaborations with service providers offer specialized services for participating youth. It promotes positive attitudes regarding school, delays childbearing, and prevents violence. The programs are available every school day. Students are expected to participate in each three-hour session.

The **Ichabod Crane and Taconic Hills School-Based Prevention Programs** are collaborative efforts between the Columbia County DSS, the two school districts, and MHACGC. Based at the school, MHACGC staff provides services to families with children who have serious emotional, social, and/or behavioral issues that put them at risk of being placed in out-of-home settings or dropping out of or failing in school. The staff offers a variety of supports to enable the family to keep the child at home and the family intact. Family support specialists provide services for 10-12 families at a time. These families have children whose behavioral, social, or emotional needs impact their ability to learn. Although the target population is kindergarten through eighth grade, the program serves the whole family.

## OHIO – [MHA of Licking County](#)

The **Signs of Suicide (SOS)** program helps middle and high school students learn about mental health, mental wellness, and the signs and symptoms of suicidal thoughts and ideation in a classroom setting over two to three days. Students are trained to recognize these symptoms in themselves, their friends, and their family members.

**Grit** is a youth development program that incorporates trauma-informed practices including mentoring, the arts, emotional and physical health, development, and well-being.

MHALC partners with the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities to provide **Youth Self-Advocacy (YSA)** to students with a developmental disability in Licking County. YSA is typically provided in special education classrooms covering rights and responsibilities, self-knowledge, effective communication, and problem solving.

## OKLAHOMA – [MHA Oklahoma](#)

The **Student Mental Health Screening** program offers a free and voluntary adolescent screening tool that assesses physical and emotional well-being. It is a proactive step designed to ensure Tulsa and Oklahoma City students' safety and get them help when they need it. The young people who participate in Student Mental Health Screening are sixth- through 12th-graders who have expressed interest in the screening and have parental permission. Teens whose parents give permission for the screening engage in the computer-based screening process, then review the results in a conversation with a licensed clinician. If the screening indicates a need for further evaluation (positive result), the clinician makes contact with parents and, typically, refers the teen to appropriate community resources for further evaluation. Student Mental Health Screening staff continue to follow-up with teens and parents to ensure they receive appropriate resources.

## PENNSYLVANIA - [MHA of Lancaster County](#)

**School-Based Mental Health Trainings** are provided on mental health topics for youth and staff and age-appropriate conversations are facilitated about mental health. Training topics include trauma-informed education and awareness, behavioral health awareness, suicide and bullying awareness, QRP training (suicide prevention), and self-care and wellness strategies.

## SOUTH CAROLINA – [MHA of Greenville County](#)

The **I.C. Hope® Don't Duck Mental Health®** program is a free public awareness and education program that teaches basic coping skills for mental health and aims to eliminate mental health stigma at a young age. Geared toward elementary school children, the program features I.C. Hope®, the Ambassador for Mental Health and Wellness. This friendly duck wears a bandage on his head to symbolize that mental illness is real and treatable. He also wears a life preserver around his neck to symbolize that every life is worth saving. The program features story time, discussion, crafts, and the oh so popular "Down with the Duck" song and dance. By the end of the program, students should be able to identify new coping skills for stress, bullying, grief, anger, and other mental health-related topics. Each session is about an hour long and features one mental health topic. The number of sessions given per group can be adjusted per request.

## TENNESSEE – [MHA of East Tennessee, Inc.](#)

**Mental Health 101** is an early intervention program for middle and high school students across Tennessee. Mental Health Association staff visit more than 120 schools annually, serving over 30,000 students in the academic year. Students are eager to learn about mental health because many know their peers are struggling with mental health problems or struggling themselves. Outcome data show gains in demonstrable knowledge of mental illness signs and symptoms, symptom duration, suicidal behaviors, and how to intervene.

## TENNESSEE – [MHA of the MidSouth](#)

The **Erasing the Stigma** program provides educational and interactive presentations for children and youth to learn how to eliminate mental health stigmas and develop coping skills for other mental health and wellness-related problems such as, but not limited to, bullying, body image and self-esteem, risky decisions, substance abuse, stress, and depression. Annually, Mental Health America of the MidSouth serves more than 20,000 children and youth in Middle and West Tennessee.

Several mental health and wellness modules with accompanying activities are available free of charge to be presented by MHA staff to classrooms, summer camps, clubs, and other civic groups. All presentations are made age/grade-appropriate and teach students about mental health stigmas and the importance of mental health wellness.

## TEXAS - [MHA of Greater Dallas](#)

**WHO** teaches anti-bullying and anti-victimization strategies to build resiliency in kids through easily-implemented curriculum. Utilizing a train the trainer program, WHO empowers educators to help their students during those sticky situations where adults are not present.

## TEXAS – [MHA of Greater Houston](#)

**The Center for School Behavioral Health** is a “living laboratory” for incubating innovative, integrative, cost-effective and replicable best practices. The Center supports the healthy psychological and cognitive development of children in the Greater Houston region through services and programs that promote behavioral health and the prevention, early identification, and treatment of behavioral health conditions (also addresses trauma). The Center works collaboratively with school districts, government institutions, public and nonprofit educational and child-serving organizations, higher learning institutions, behavioral health providers, other community stakeholders (including advocacy groups), students, and parents. The Center advocates for implementing sensible public and school policies to close gaps in services and eliminate constraints that exacerbate students’ behavioral health needs.

**The Emotional Backpack Project Campaign** – The Emotional Backpack Project Campaign explains an emotional backpack as an invisible bag filled with life experiences. A diverse group of children and young people discuss the importance of filling a child’s emotional backpack with the information, ideas, words, thoughts, self-care tools, skills, and strategies they need to stay mentally healthy wherever they go. The Emotional Backpack Project teaches youth, parents, and educators about mental health and local resources. Additional training modules, lesson plans, and activities are available to help schools infuse mental health into the campus culture.

**Emotional Backpack Leaders** is a program where schools select one or two Emotional Backpack Leaders to participate in a train the trainer program for a full year. Emotional Backpack Leaders then use the training modules at the school. The training teaches participants how to teach the Emotional Backpack Project curriculum to educators, parents, and students. Participants learn how to present the program with fidelity to the tested core model and apply it to a range of adult and student learning styles.

## VIRGINIA – [MHA of Fredericksburg](#)

The **Suicide Prevention Education Program** empowers middle and high school students with the ability to identify the signs and symptoms of suicide and depression and teaches them what they can do to get help. The curriculum used is Signs of Suicide (SOS), developed by Screening for Mental Health, Inc. It is listed on SAMSHA’S National Registry of evidence-based programs and practices for high school, while the middle school program is considered a best practice. Students are taught that suicide is not a normal response to stress but is a preventable tragedy that can be a result of untreated depression. The program has been implemented in Spotsylvania County and Fredericksburg City public schools at the seventh and ninth grade level.

The Mental Health America Fredericksburg Virginia (MHAFVA) **Teen Council** actively works toward spreading awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health in our schools and community. The focus is to educate, raise awareness, and give teens a voice. It is open to teens currently enrolled in a high school program in Planning District 16 (Spotsylvania, Fredericksburg, Stafford, King George, and Caroline).

## WISCONSIN – [MHA Lakeshore](#)

**Social Emotional Learning Brought to You** is an evidence-based curriculum developed and used by Growing Minds as well as an expanded curriculum and programming developed by MHA Mindfulness Instructors providing additional tools for teachers. The curriculum lessons fall into four different categories, each relevant to concepts within the classroom including focus and attention; self-awareness and self-regulation; knowledge of thoughts and emotions; and social skills and relationships.

MHA Lakeshore provides **educational presentations** for students in grades K-12. Trainings are available both in person (when appropriate) and virtually. They include depression and anxiety, depression and suicide, B4Stage4 Mental Health Matters for youth, stress management, and customized programs.

# RESOURCES FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS

**Encuentra Qué Decir** has information about mental health, how to support someone with depression, and how to talk to children. Learn more at <https://www.encuentraquedecir.org>.

**Latinx Therapy** was founded in 2018 with the mission to destigmatize mental health in the Latinx community. Since then, they have expanded to become a bilingual podcast and national directory to find a Latinx therapist (98% of the directory is Spanish speakers). Latinx Therapy strives to provide culturally-grounded workshops and services to the community. Learn more at <https://www.latinxtherapy.com>.

The **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** has a variety of resources available specific to children who live with trauma, including those who are dealing with migration and separation issues. Learn more at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/informacion-en-espanol>.

**My Life is Worth Living™** is the first animated series that models the human connection shown to be protective against suicide. The series tells stories of characters who face some of the most difficult issues that young people deal with and shows their evolution in a key decision: that life is worth living. Videos are available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, and Japanese. Learn more at <https://www.mylifeisworthliving.org/watch/watch-spanish>.

# SOCIAL BELONGING AND CONFIDENCE

Most of us remember how tough middle and high school could be in terms of your social life – and that was before what social media is today. As adults it can be hard to think back and remember that social acceptance or popularity is a genuine priority in children and adolescents' lives. When something matters to young people, the adults in their life need to take it seriously – especially when it has real impacts on their health the way socialization does.



## WHY DOES YOUTH SOCIAL LIFE & CONFIDENCE MATTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

It's human nature to want to fit in and be accepted by our peers. As young people start to become aware of feelings of belonging, they typically seek it out in friends and social groups – a big part of developing a sense of identity outside of their family. Adolescent brains are hardwired to be focused on this social acceptance. Growing up is full of everyday challenges, and studies have found peer friendships to be particularly helpful in coping with stress.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, brain imaging studies have found that the same parts of the brain are activated by social rejection as by physical pain.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance isn't as easy as just finding some people to hang out with. Even if someone has a great friend group and healthy peer relationships, insecurity or low self-esteem can have them feeling on edge, fearful, or more likely to engage in unsafe behaviors.

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## WHY ARE YOUTH FEELING INSECURE AND DISCONNECTED FROM THEIR PEERS?

Even the most confident people have insecurities and overcoming self-doubt during adolescence is part of maturing into an adult. Young people are facing very real pressures from peers, parents, and society, on top of hormonal changes – all of which can set them up to feel bad about themselves.

Life is full of shifting social dynamics, most notably during adolescence. Kids and teens frequently have difficult social situations going on, whether it's a breakup, a fight with a friend, or being excluded by classmates. Even the kids and teens who seem to get along with everyone may struggle with not having a close friend group to turn to or feel like no one *truly* knows them. Feeling lonely or disconnected doesn't necessarily mean being alone – it's a subjective feeling of loneliness that can exist even when around others.

This generation of students has also had to cope with situations you didn't experience as an adolescent – the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual schooling. While it's true these youth are used to connecting with friends online, young people have been deeply impacted by social isolation. Just a few months into the pandemic in June 2020, a study found nearly 30% of high school youth didn't feel at all connected to teachers, classmates, or the school community.<sup>3</sup>

Low self-esteem and social isolation are major risk factors in developing a mental health condition, like depression.

If you think your child is struggling, take the Parent Test at [MHAScreening.org](https://MHAScreening.org) to see if they're dealing with symptoms of emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties.



# HELPING YOUTH BUILD CONFIDENCE

**Be their cheerleader.** Young people need a lot of validation and reassurance as they learn to feel secure in themselves. Name their successes, be excited for them (even if they roll their eyes in the moment), and keep letting them know that they matter to you.

**Notice triggers.** What causes the young person you care about to shut down or turn inwards? Is there a pattern or common factor you can identify when they struggle with insecurity? Finding the root of their feelings can guide you to a clearer starting point on how best to support them.

**Guide them in establishing goals and strategies to achieve them.** Feeling accomplished goes a long way in building self-confidence. Help them figure out what matters to them – what do they want to achieve? Support them in making an action plan and sticking to it.

## FACILITATING CONNECTION AMONG YOUTH

### FOR PARENTS:

#### Be mindful of your own self-talk.

Even if it doesn't always seem like it, kids listen and pick up on the negative ways their parents talk about their own bodies, intelligence, and self in general. If it would hurt you to know your child is thinking the same thing about themselves, don't say it in front of them (and work on it for yourself, too!).

#### Help set them up for social success.

You might feel helpless when it comes to their relationships with peers at school, but that's not the only place to meet people their age. Don't shame them for not having friends at school. Find other opportunities to connect them with peers – do you have coworkers with children their age? Are there neighborhood kids? What about local events, clubs, or classes?

#### Foster open communication.

Vulnerability begets vulnerability, so be open to sharing a bit about your feelings or struggles with them. Ask questions, be interested in their answers, and follow up with them so they know you genuinely care.

### FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL:

#### Establish a classroom community.

Set expectations together – what values does this group have? What behavior is and isn't okay in the classroom? While it's the teacher's responsibility to ensure a conducive learning environment, valuing the input of students sets the tone that the class is a team and you're all here to support each other.

#### Help them meet people with similar interests.

Hear of a new book club starting up? Tell the student who you always catch reading at their desk. Have a few students who always turn in amazing art projects? See if they want to have a drawing meet-up during lunch one day.

## IN CRISIS?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

### SOURCES

- <sup>1</sup> Scheuplein, M. & van Harmelen, A.L. (2022). The importance of friendships in reducing brain responses to stress in adolescents exposed to childhood adversity: a preregistered systematic review. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352250X22000124>
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# WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE LOSE SOMEONE

Adolescence is full of shifting relationship dynamics – most of us remember how hard it was as a young person to say goodbye to someone we cared about after a breakup, a big fight with a friend, or a loved one passing away. The current young generation – Generation Z – is facing these normal coming-of-age challenges on top of the frequent grief that comes with living in modern society. Youth these days are experiencing tremendous, and often consistent, losses as they grow up during a pandemic, regular mass shootings, and increasing rates of youth suicide and domestic violence.



## HOW LOSS AND GRIEF IMPACT YOUTH

Everyone handles loss in their own way, and youth are no different. Their reactions can depend on many things, like age, gender, personality, type of loss, relation to the person lost, amount of support around them, and more. But they will all need consistent attention, reassurance, and care as they adjust. Below are some common signs of grief in different age groups.

### AGES 5-12

**Elementary and middle school-aged children may struggle to understand loss, whether it comes through death or other change. Look for these signs:**

- » Self-blame for the loss
- » Seeming distracted, forgetful
- » Increased anxiety (often related to loss – fear of others dying, friends abandoning them, the future)
  - » Increased attachment to caregiver(s)
  - » Avoidance of school
- » Physical symptoms (especially stomachache and headache)
- » Withdrawal from usual activities
  - » Behavior issues (aggression, tantrums, defiance)
  - » Changes in eating and sleeping habits
  - » Temporary regression in age-appropriate development (bed-wetting, baby talk, etc.)

### AGES 13-18

**Teenagers are already in a time of big transition and grief can influence how they move from dependence on caregivers to independence. Look for these signs:**

- » Seeming distracted, difficulty concentrating
  - » Withdrawal, needing more alone time
- » Taking on adult responsibilities, taking care of those around them
  - » Difficulty expressing emotions
- » Increased anxiety (often related to loss – fear of others dying, friends abandoning them, the future)
- » Questions about death and dying
  - » Using jokes and humor to mask/minimize the loss
  - » Physical symptoms (especially stomachache and headache)
- » Getting into trouble, risky behavior to escape or find comfort
  - » Temporary regression in age-appropriate development (independence, confidence)
  - » Strained relationships
  - » Worsening self-image, self-esteem, confidence

## FAST FACTS



In the first 15 months of COVID-19, over 140,000 children in the U.S. lost a primary or secondary caregiver.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty-five percent of the youth who have lost a primary caregiver due to COVID-19 are Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color (BIPOC).<sup>2</sup>

LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than their straight and cisgender peers, primarily because of rejection by and loss of their family of origin.<sup>3</sup>

Firearm-related deaths among children and adolescents increased 30% between 2019 and 2020.<sup>4</sup>

The suicide rate for youth ages 10-14 nearly tripled between 2007 and 2017.<sup>5</sup>

In 2019, nearly 9% of high school students said they had attempted suicide at least once in the previous 12 months.<sup>6</sup>

Fatal overdoses among adolescents increased by 94% from 2019 to 2020.<sup>7</sup>

# SUPPORTING YOUTH THROUGH GRIEF

## VALIDATE FEELINGS AND REASSURE SAFETY

Loss is often confusing and can impact a young person's sense of safety in the world, whether from physical harm and death or from abandonment and emotional pain. Lead with comforting them and acknowledging how hard this must be. Reestablishing safety isn't a quick process, but reminding them that one loss doesn't mean others will follow is a good start.

## MAINTAIN STRUCTURE

Young people often rely on the adults in their life to help them stay regulated, especially during times of significant change. Help them stay consistent with their typical daily activities and schedule and avoid other unnecessary changes until you notice them starting to return to their old self.

## ANSWER QUESTIONS HONESTLY

Kids have active imaginations and are likely to start filling in the details they don't have as they try to navigate a loss. Listen to their thoughts and questions, and don't be afraid to get sad or say that you don't know. Young people need to hear the truth from someone they trust.

## CONSIDER CULTURE

Remember that different cultures and families have different views of death and mourning. Children will likely process grief based on how the people around them handle loss. They usually pick this up from family members but may also have ideas about grief from their peers or media. If a child is struggling, allow them to process the loss in the way that comes naturally to them – as long as it's not harmful to themselves or others. Connect with the child's other communities (school, place of worship, neighborhood, etc.) if you need help facilitating healing.

## CONNECT TO PROFESSIONAL HELP

Additional assistance is never a bad idea, and resources like counselors or support groups can help youth feel less alone in their grief. Check out the National Alliance for Children's Grief ([childrengrieve.org/find-support](http://childrengrieve.org/find-support)) to find services in your area.



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## IN CRISIS?

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### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/more-140000-us-children-lost-primary-or-secondary-caregiver-due-covid-19-pandemic>

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<sup>3</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schlueter, D., Chávez, R. & Farrell, A.F. (in press). Prevalence and correlates of youth homelessness in the United States. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

<sup>4</sup> Goldstick JE, Cunningham RM, Carter PM. Current causes of death in children and adolescents in the United States. *N Engl J Med* 2022;386:1955-1956.

<sup>5</sup> NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality. [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352\\_tables-508.pdf#page=2](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352_tables-508.pdf#page=2)

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# WHEN HOME LIFE IS HARD

Kids and teens often get a reputation for not liking school, but for some students, it's a relief from their home life. Whether they're dealing with serious challenges at home, like food insecurity, or just don't feel understood by their parents, many children and teens don't see home as an enjoyable environment. Factors related to home life – socioeconomic status, family dynamics, and even home cleanliness – can play a key role in mental health and well-being, especially among adolescents.



## WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOUTH FACING AT HOME?

### Seeking independence

Everyone goes through the transition from child to young adult, and that “in-between” stage can be tough. As they branch out on their own, they may be facing more parent-child conflict, feel controlled or judged, or feel unsure of who they are.

### Cultural differences

A lot of tension between parents and children comes from differences in opinion. Social norms vary among communities, and first- or second-generation children who have grown up in American culture may clash with their parents more than expected. Generations have different cultures, too – children and teens with significantly older parents might also have a hard time understanding each other.

### Competing responsibilities

As much as we wish kids could just be kids, the reality is that many of them have obligations. They're caring for younger siblings, responsible for cooking for themselves at a young age, or may need to have a job (or multiple). They may be struggling to focus on their schoolwork or missing out on social time with their peers.

### Life circumstances

Some young people are dealing with tough situations that can't be easily fixed – financial challenges, food insecurity, houselessness, conflict between parents or siblings, and more. Sometimes little can be done to alleviate these issues, so it's easy for kids and teens in these environments to feel hopeless or ashamed.

### Abuse

Rates of violence in the home increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Feeling physically and emotionally safe is the foundation of everything else – including learning, social development, and behavior.

Most families face challenges at some point, and it's common for relationships in the home to get more tense as kids grow up and face adolescence.

If you think your child is having a tough time at home but aren't sure how to help, visit [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) and take the parent screen to see if they might be dealing with symptoms of a mental health condition.



## FOR PARENTS: WHY IS MY CHILD UNHAPPY AT HOME AND WHAT CAN I DO?

### Meet them where they're at.

Remember what it was like to be their age? Puberty and hormones, social pressures, dating, body image issues, and the list goes on. They're also dealing with modern stressors related to COVID-19, frequent school shootings, and social media. Make an effort to understand what's weighing on your child's mind and support them, even if you don't quite get why it's a big deal to them.

### Team up with your child.

Listen, commiserate, and validate – even if they brush you off sometimes. Young people often feel alone as they figure out what growing up is all about, and while parents aren't usually their first choice of who to turn to, knowing that you'll be there if they decide to can go a long way in helping them feel secure and supported.

### Get them connected to additional support.

If the issues at home are situational and things that you can't resolve or change, the best way to help them is to provide resources to help them cope. If you don't know where to start, talk to their teacher or school counselor about options.

## FOR SCHOOL STAFF: HOW TO BEST SUPPORT YOUTH WITH CHALLENGING HOME LIVES

### Pick your battles.

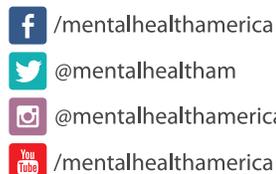
If you know (or suspect) a student has a lot of responsibilities at home or is dealing with other challenges, be flexible and accommodating. Allow them to eat breakfast in class if you have a feeling they're rushing to get their siblings ready for school in the mornings, and understand that sometimes your homework isn't going to be their priority.

### Ensure you understand your students and their age group.

Many youth feel chronically misunderstood, especially by their parents. Putting in the effort to be somewhat familiar with trends and cultural norms will go a long way in making them feel that adults can be understanding and approachable.

### Be a safe space for them.

Offer to listen, help them find support or resources, and be a positive and engaged adult role model in their life. Be cautious of your own capacity to provide support so that you don't overextend yourself.



### SOURCES

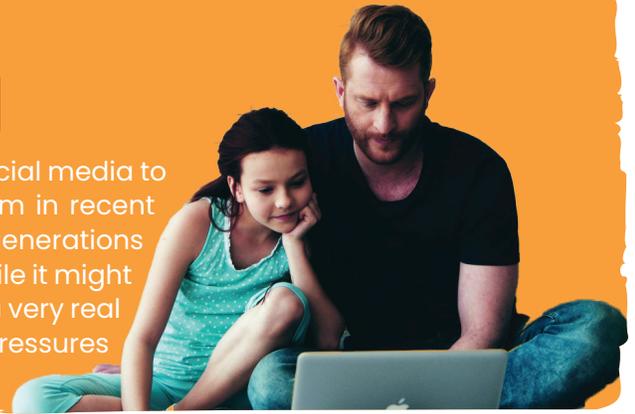
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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

It can be difficult for adults who grew up without or with limited social media to get why it's so important to young people. The technology boom in recent years has created a massive cultural difference between older generations and Generation Z, who grew up with widespread social media. While it might not seem important to you, social media matters to youth and is a very real part of our world – so it's important to understand the unique pressures and challenges they face because of it.



## WHAT YOUTH ARE SAYING

### How does social media help your mental health?

- "WATCHING ASMR VIDEOS"
- "BY MAKING ME NOT FEEL ALONE"
- "IT GIVES ME AN ESCAPE WHEN I AM FEELING VERY ANXIOUS"
- "ACCESS TO VISUALS/BITE-SIZED INFO RELATED TO COPING STRATEGIES, MENTAL HEALTH, ETC."
- "I FOLLOW A LOT OF POSITIVE ACCOUNTS THAT INSPIRE ME"
- "FEELING CONNECTED TO THE GREATER WHOLE"
- "FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS THAT SUPPORT MY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY"
- "CONNECTING WITH FRIENDS FAR AWAY"

### How does social media harm your mental health?

- "POSTS GLORIFYING EATING DISORDERS"
- "WHEN I LOSE TRACK OF TIME AND END UP SCROLLING THE DAY AWAY"
- "COMPARISON"
- "BLACK HOLES OF NEGATIVITY"
- "WATCHING EXTREME UNHEALTHY CONFLICT IN COMMENTS"
- "EXPECTING FOR PEOPLE TO RESPOND AS FAST AS I WANT THEM TO"
- "MODELS"
- "LOOKING AT PEOPLE HAVING A LIFE I WISH TO HAVE"
- "SEEING OTHERS THAT HAVE BETTER LOOKING BODIES THAN I DO"

## FAST FACTS

- Forty-five percent of teens believe social media has neither a positive nor negative impact on people their age. 31% say social media has a mostly positive impact and 24% say it has a mostly negative impact.<sup>1</sup>
- Most teens who view social media as generally positive emphasized its role in keeping in touch and interacting with others.<sup>2</sup>
- 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced abusive online behaviors, with the most common being name-calling which 42% of teens say they have experienced.<sup>3</sup>
- During COVID-19, poorer mental health was associated with using social media for entertainment motives. Better mental health was associated with using social media for personal contact and keeping up relationships.<sup>4</sup>
- A global study found school loneliness to be correlated with increases in smartphone and internet use – when countries reached a point where half of the teen population had access to smartphones, loneliness levels began to rise.<sup>5</sup>
- Youth from lower-income families are more likely to report that their online experiences led to negative offline interactions.<sup>6</sup>
- Almost twice as many LGBTQ+ students reported being cyberbullied compared to heterosexual students (36% versus 20%).<sup>7</sup>
- Lower socioeconomic status can exacerbate the negative impacts of social media through comparisons to more affluent peers, more unstructured time in the home, or lack of outdoor spaces.<sup>8</sup>

# CULTIVATING HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE WITH YOUTH IN YOUR LIFE

While social media can certainly cause problems, it's here to stay and young people are going to use it whether adults like it or not. Parents and schools have a tough job – the goal isn't to keep students off social media altogether, but to support them in developing healthy social media behaviors.

## Celebrate the positives

When youth feel judged or misunderstood about their social media use, they're likely to get defensive or shut down. Make sure to point out how great it is that they were able to connect with their friends and family who live far away, or comment on how helpful it must be to reach most of their classmates for an emergency study buddy.

## Ask questions

Let's face it – most youth know way more about social media than the adults in their life. And they definitely know more about what exactly they're doing online. Instead of starting conversations by talking about the harms or effects of social media, be open and curious about their unique experiences with it.

## Promote limiting screen time

Everything in moderation, right? Excessive time on the internet and social media has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Younger children will need more help with this – consider setting time limits or media-free zones. As children get older, support them in managing their own usage – encourage them to dedicate time to offline activities or help them update their phone settings to limit time on certain apps..

## Model healthy use

Young people notice what adults are doing more than we may think, including being told to get off their devices while the adults in their life seem just as obsessed. It can be tempting to try to manage their use, but you're better off modeling healthy habits (age dependent, of course). Studies have shown that parental use of digital technology, rather than their attitudes toward it, determines how their children will engage with it.

## Friend/follow your kids' accounts

Your kids – especially teenagers – might resist you monitoring their social media, but it's important that you're (somewhat) informed of what's happening in their online world. Explain your reasoning, listen to their hesitations, and let them set boundaries. Your virtual relationship with your child is an entirely new one, so be patient. Your best bet to build trust is to stay in the background: Don't comment or like their posts unless they want you to, let the little things slide, and be ready to have offline conversations about the important things.

If social media use seems to be impacting the mental health of a child or teen in your life, suggest that they take a screen at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to determine if they might be experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.



 /mentalhealthamerica

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**IN CRISIS?** If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/58624/how-parents-and-educators-can-support-healthy-teen-use-of-social-media>

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# FITTING IN AND SELF-ESTEEM

Everyone feels awkward, insecure, or alone at times – especially during adolescence. Between how media depicts growing up, mean kids at school, and puberty, it's unfortunately common to not feel great about yourself sometimes. The secret is: Most of your peers feel this way too – even the ones who seem to have it all.



## WHY IS IT SO HARD TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT MY SOCIAL LIFE?

From around ages 10 to 24, you're in a stage of life where you feel social stressors more intensely – it's just part of how the human brain works.<sup>1</sup> These days, young people are also feeling lonelier than any other age group, and about twice as many adolescents worldwide are experiencing loneliness than just 10 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

Some experts think kids and teens have lower self-esteem nowadays in part because of technology<sup>3</sup> – there are big differences between socializing online and in-person, and things like miscommunications, social comparisons, and fear of missing out (FOMO) can end in hurt feelings. Or maybe you're getting bullied or being excluded by your peers, or have been in the past, and can't stop worrying about it happening again. Keep in mind that at this age, your social circle is likely still limited to people in your school or hometown – depending on where you live, there simply might not be many people around you who have the same interests, hobbies, or values for you to be friends with. And even if you do have plenty of friends to hang out with, it's still possible to feel lonely or like others don't accept the real you.

## TIPS FOR BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem refers to your overall sense of worth – how much you like and respect yourself! Healthy self-esteem can help you feel empowered to reach your goals, express your needs, and have a more positive outlook on life.

### Remember: You can't read people's minds.

It's easy to assume how someone feels about you – based on a text they never replied to, a weird look they gave you in the hall, or just the fact that you've never really interacted. None of these things mean they don't like you – so try to stop your brain when it starts creating a story about what they must be thinking.

### Notice your negative thoughts and challenge them.

When you catch yourself thinking in extremes (nobody likes me, I'll never have any friends), try to challenge them or find the middle ground. Does nobody like you, or do you feel unwanted by a few people at school? Will you never have friends, or are you just surrounded by the same classmates you've been with for years or people who aren't like you? Most of us are our own worst critics.

### Use positive self-talk.

Everyone has strengths and (many!) good qualities. What do you like or appreciate about yourself? Write these things down so that you have a running list to add more to as you think of them! If coming up with specific things feels too hard right now, try repeating basic affirmations, like "I am strong" or "I matter." You can also ask a friend or loved one what they think are your best qualities to get you started.

### Practice self-compassion.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of loving yourself, but that doesn't always feel doable and even just liking yourself can feel too hard. Start with trying to not hate or dislike yourself. Can you think of reasons why you deserve some kindness and patience? There's a lot going on in the world right now – the best you can do is good enough.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY

There are a lot of different ways to form and be in a community. A community is a group of people who usually share interests, neighborhood, school, religion, or other things in common.

### ••• Chat with a classmate you think you'd get along with. •••

Just because you haven't hung out with someone before doesn't mean they wouldn't be interested in being friends. Talking to or making plans with someone new can be intimidating, but all new friendships have to start somewhere.

### Get involved outside of school.

If you don't relate to other students around you, it's easy to feel alone and isolated at school. Luckily, school isn't your only option for connecting with peers. Look into local clubs, volunteer opportunities, library teen programs, sports, or community classes to meet people that you already have something in common with.

### ▶ Try to start a conversation with one new person every day. ◀

It might feel weird at first, but nothing has to come of it. Not all conversations turn into friendships, but getting used to interacting with new people will help you feel more prepared when you do meet someone who could be a great friend.

### Be friendly to people you see in passing.

Quick interactions with people, like a Starbucks barista, the grocery store cashier, or your bus driver, wouldn't seem like they'd make a difference, but it plays a pretty big role in helping you feel connected to your broader community. Your community isn't just your friends – it's also the people you recognize as you go about your days.

## YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THEY STRUGGLE TO FEEL ACCEPTED BECAUSE...

"EVERYONE ELSE SEEMS TO HAVE AN EASIER TIME GETTING THROUGH LIFE"

"IT'S HARD TO RELATE AND TRUST PEOPLE"

"I DON'T HAVE THE SAME INTERESTS AS OTHERS MY AGE"

"THERE'S BEEN A LONG HISTORY OF BRUTALIZATION OF MY PEOPLE"

"SOME OF US DON'T BELIEVE IN THE SAME THINGS"

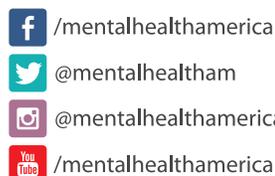
"I OVERTHINK AND IT MAKES ME FEEL DISCONNECTED"

"PEERS MIGHT NOT LIKE HOW I ACT"

"I'M NOT POPULAR AND AM AUTOMATICALLY SEEN AS WEIRD, EVEN TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW ME YET"

It can be hard to know if your insecurities or troubles with friends are just a part of growing up or if they're signs of a mental health condition, like anxiety or depression.

If you're putting yourself out there and still feel disconnected from your peers or unhappy with your social life, take a mental health screen at [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org).



## IN CRISIS?

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### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Orben, A., Phil, D., Tomova, L., & Blakemore, S.J. (2020). The effects of social deprivation on adolescent development and health. *Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(8), 634-640. [www.doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30186-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30186-3)  
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# LOSING SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT

Loss is a part of life. We all face losing someone we love, whether from death, a breakup, or just growing apart from an old friend. It's not uncommon to experience this a lot during adolescence as friendships and relationships shift, loved ones age, and tragedies occur. Your generation has also faced more death and loss than many other generations when they were your age. You are growing up during a pandemic, regular mass shootings, and increased rates of youth suicide.



## WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is the reaction you have after experiencing a loss. It often impacts your mind, body, and spirit. Grief also refers to the process of coping with a loss: dealing with tough emotions, coming to terms with the loss, and finding ways to move forward. This doesn't mean forgetting about loved ones who have passed away or are no longer in your life – it means figuring out how to remember them and adjust to what your life looks like without them.

The pain of grief is typically most intense right after the loss, but some people first feel shock or numbness before reality sinks in. People often experience grief in "waves" – maybe you have a great weekend and then see something that brings all of the hurt back, or you feel like you've mostly healed and then the one-year anniversary comes and you can't stop crying. Either way, you're bound to have some good days and some really tough days. There's no one way to grieve or limit on the amount of time you're allowed to feel this way.

## YOUNG PEOPLE SAY LOSING SOMEONE THEY CARE ABOUT FEELS LIKE...

"I LOST A PIECE OF ME I NEVER KNEW I HAD"

"THE AIR'S BEEN STOLEN FROM MY LUNGS"

"I LOST EVERYTHING"

"I MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG TO DETER THEM"

"AN OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE TO LIVE THROUGH"

"CRUSHING ALL OF THE INNOCENCE I TOOK FOR GRANTED"

"LIKE A SHADOW I CAN'T REACH"

## EMOTIONS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE

- » Denial
- » Loneliness
- » Fear
- » Anger
- » Confusion
- » Embarrassment
- » Shock
- » Hopelessness
- » Sadness
- » Guilt

## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE

- » More likely to get sick (lowered immunity)
- » Stomachaches
- » Body aches & pains
- » Headaches
- » Changes in appetite
- » Fatigue
- » Difficulty sleeping
- » Nausea
- » Dizziness

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# TIPS FOR PROCESSING GRIEF

## EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

As much as you might wish it would, keeping the pain inside of you doesn't make it go away. Talk to someone you trust, write, draw, look at photo albums, or tell stories about your loved one.

## FIND MEANING IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Losing someone you love can be so painful that you question if it's worth it to get that close to someone ever again. Spend some time reflecting on the positives of the lost relationship – what did they mean to you? What did you learn from them? Are there things you appreciate more now?

## MOVE YOUR BODY

Playing a sport, taking a walk, stretching, or even just dancing around your room to your favorite songs can help release some stress and sadness.

## BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

Everyone grieves differently and on their own timeline. Try not to compare your healing to others' journeys or have expectations about when you'll be "over it."

## FIND LITTLE MOMENTS OF HAPPINESS

It can be confusing to experience joy after a big loss – it might even feel wrong, like you *shouldn't* be okay. But happiness fuels hope and can help you start to move forward even though life looks different.

## DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

Many people find therapy or support groups helpful in dealing with loss, no matter where they are in the grieving process. It's especially important to seek help if you're thinking about hurting yourself or someone else.

It can be hard to recognize the difference between grief and some mental health conditions, like depression or PTSD.

If a few months have gone by and you still feel how you did at the beginning of your grieving process, or like your grief is making it hard to keep up with school, friends, and hobbies, take a mental health screen at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org).

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# WHEN HOME LIFE IS HARD

Everyone's home life is different, and no one's is perfect. Growing up isn't easy and feeling sad or uncomfortable at home can add stress to other challenges you might be facing, like troubles with school and friends. Maybe you're even feeling guilty for feeling this way because you suspect that some of your peers "have it worse." But that doesn't make your challenges any less big to *you*, and you're the one who has to deal with them. No matter what's making life difficult at home for you right now, your feelings about it are valid.



## THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH AT HOME

### Conflict with parents

You may find yourself butting heads with your parents as you try to gain more independence. Or maybe you feel like they just don't understand you. Adults and young people have different priorities, so what's important to your parents might not make sense to you, and vice versa. And while some parts of growing up never change, there are many things about your youth that are very different from when your parents were young. There might be cultural differences at play too – depending on if and when your parents came to the U.S. from another country, you might be having an American childhood that is totally unfamiliar to them.

### Too many responsibilities

Depending on interests, family relationships, and privilege, you and your peers likely have lots of different responsibilities. Maybe it's a vigorous schedule of sports and other extracurriculars, or it could be having to take care of chores and siblings while working part-time – or trying to balance all of the above. When you have more responsibilities than your friends, it can seem unfair and leave you feeling like you are missing out on the fun social things other people your age are doing or desperate for some downtime for yourself – which are valid feelings.

### Unaccepting family members

Unfortunately, too many young people live with parents and families that aren't accepting of who they are. Whether it's because of your sexuality, gender expression, interests, style, or something else, feeling like your family doesn't love the *real you* is painful. This often means you can't talk to your parents or siblings about the challenges you face in your day-to-day life, and you may even feel like who you are is wrong. In some cases, this can escalate to bullying, verbal and emotional abuse, or even physical abuse.

### Life circumstances

Sometimes young people have very adult problems. When your family is having money trouble, you don't have enough food, you don't have a stable place to live, or a family member has health issues, you may find that you're constantly worried. Being on high alert all the time is exhausting and can take a toll on your mental health. Maybe your family looks different than the "mom, dad, kids" stereotype. Having a different living situation or family structure than your peers can bring up feelings of stress, anxiety, shame, or uncertainty. It's important to remember that families can be made up of relatives, friends, and any other caregiver.

### Abuse

Child abuse is when someone who is supposed to take care of you intentionally hurts you physically, sexually, or emotionally. It can be hard to recognize abuse because it's natural to trust that the people who are supposed to care for you wouldn't hurt you. If you feel scared or unsafe at home, you might be experiencing some form of abuse. No matter what, abuse is never your fault, and you deserve to feel safe around the people in your life. The safest thing you can do if you're being hurt (or are scared you will be hurt) by someone in your life is to talk to a trusted adult outside of your home. Learn more at [mhanational.org/understanding-abuse](http://mhanational.org/understanding-abuse).

# YOU AREN'T ALONE



Twenty-three percent of people under the age of 18 in the U.S. live with one parent and no other adults at home.<sup>1</sup>

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already an estimated 5.4 million children and adolescents in the U.S. providing care to another family member.<sup>2</sup>

Sixteen percent of all children nationwide are living in poverty. Poverty rates are disproportionately high for youth of color – Black (28%), Indigenous (25%), and Latinx (23%) youth are more likely to grow up poor than white (10%) and Asian American/Pacific Islander (9%) peers.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty-eight percent of LGBTQ+ youth report having experienced homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

# COPING WITH A TOUGH HOME LIFE

## Find another space

It's important to have a space – in addition to school – where you can get away from the stress of being at home. This might be a physical space that you feel good in and can go to when needed, like a friend's house, library, or local park. You can also find this safety in social connections or groups through clubs, teams, volunteering, or places of worship.

## Look for small solutions

Sometimes we can't fix the main problem, but there's often a way to make some progress. If you keep missing out on plans because you need to watch your sibling, talk to your parents to see if a family member or neighbor can do it, or if your sibling can go to a friend's house so that you have some free time. If you don't have enough to eat or a stable place to live, talk to a trusted teacher, coach, or your school counselor about resources that might be available for your family through school or the community. No matter what challenges you're facing, it can be useful to write down who is in your circle of support so that you know who is there to help you when you need it.

## Talk to your parents

It's easy to forget that your parents are just people, too. They may be unsure how to interact with you, especially if you're their oldest or only child. Let them know what you want – to spend more time together, to have more conversations, to hear more about their experiences growing up. Share a bit about your life with them. This will only help so much if your parents are the biggest part of the problem, but if you think their hearts are in the right place, it's worth a try.

## Identify a safe adult

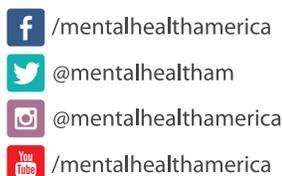
Unfortunately, not everyone who becomes a parent is ready for that kind of commitment and responsibility to their child(ren). You deserve to have a safe person to look up to in your life. If it isn't your biological parent or guardian, look to other adults, like grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, or coaches for support.

It's normal for growing up to cause challenges between parents and children, and lots of families go through challenging times.

If you're struggling with a lot of stress, hopelessness, or loneliness, visit [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) and take a screen to see if you might be dealing with symptoms of a mental health condition. Based on your confidential results, you'll get resources and tips to help you out.

## IN CRISIS?

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### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/12/12/religion-and-living-arrangements-around-the-world/>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/sop2.14>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Social media plays a big role in modern society, especially for young people – but it's still pretty new. It's one of the biggest differences about the way you're growing up and the way your parents, teachers, and other adults in your life grew up. While you might not be able to imagine a world ever existing without social media, researchers are still learning about its impact on mental health.



## ALMOST EVERYONE IS ON SOCIAL

Nearly all teenagers – 94% – in developed countries use social media.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and 45% consider themselves to be online “almost constantly.”<sup>2</sup> There are some good things that come from being well-connected to each other in the virtual world, but it can cause harm as well.

### PROS

#### Identity exploration.

For many young people, especially those in more rural areas, social media can help them figure out who they are and learn from others like them.

#### Connection.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became an important way of staying connected to your friends and family who you couldn't see in person and making new friends online to help combat loneliness.

#### Learning new things.

You can't find new interests and things you love if you don't know they exist. Social media is a great way to stumble upon new hobbies, interests, trends, tutorials, books – the list goes on.

#### Taking action.

A lot of times, the issues the world is facing can seem too big and make you feel helpless, but social media can connect you to others for social change and help you make a difference through broader campaigns.

### CONS

#### FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out).

Social media lets you stay tuned in to what others are doing at all times, which can lead to feeling left out if you aren't invited or just can't make the plans.

#### Comparison.

The things you see on social media may make you feel like your life is boring compared to others; you may find yourself comparing your body to photos of others (beware of filters and photoshop!); or you may judge how many likes/comments your posts get compared to other people.

#### Cyberbullying and harassment.

It is easier to be mean to people from behind a screen, so internet trolls and online bullying from people you know can take place.

#### Information overload.

The news or the general state of the world might make you feel down, but it can be hard to give yourself space when things are constantly in your news feed. On top of that, it can be hard to know which sources to trust.

#### Unsafe people.

Sometimes you don't know if the person you're talking to is really who they say they are. People may interact through completely fake profiles (catfishing), and others might lie about their reasons for interacting with you.



# WHAT DOES UNHEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE LOOK LIKE?

While there are definite benefits to being active on social media, it's important not to go overboard. Social media platforms are designed to suck you in – getting likes and comments triggers the reward system in your brain, keeping you craving more.

If you are doing any of the following or notice yourself falling into these habits, it's probably time to address how social media is impacting you:

- Checking social media as soon as you wake up.
- Mindlessly scrolling through your feed longer than you planned to.
- Constantly updating your followers (photos of every meal, every activity you do).
- Anxiously checking for likes and comments.
- Scrolling social media often while spending in-person time with others.
- Comparing yourself excessively to others based on what they share.

## TIPS FOR A HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

### Reduce your use.

It's easy to not realize how much time you're spending on social media each day or to get sucked into endless scrolling until all of a sudden, hours have gone by. Many phones have settings where you can view your screen time and put a limit on your app usage (your phone will notify you once you've hit your allotted time). You can choose to override it, but it's a great step in becoming more aware of your use.

### Unfollow or mute people whose content you don't want to see.

Your social media feeds can be whatever you want them to be – and there's no reason for them to be full of posts that make you angry, sad, anxious, or have other negative feelings. Even if someone's posts don't bother you but just seeing their name triggers a negative reaction, take them off your feed. Muting is a great option if you're worried about them knowing you unfollowed them.

### Limit how many news sources you follow.

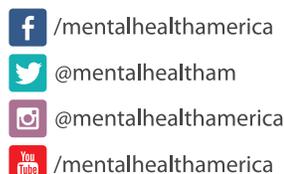
It's important to stay informed, but the human brain wasn't meant to take in as much scary and bad news as most of us do these days. Instead of filling your feed with news, intentionally seek out information when you want it – and make sure it's coming from well-researched sources. This way you'll know you're prepared and in the mindset to consume news instead of having it pop up when you open Instagram for a brain break.

### Work on your mindset.

We're all bound to see things we don't want to see on social media – friends hanging out without you, a cute couple when you're feeling lonely, or photo after photo of seemingly perfect influencers. This can put negative thoughts in your head that you can't seem to get out. Try out this tool to help overcome them: [screening.mhanational.org/activity/overcoming-thoughts](https://screening.mhanational.org/activity/overcoming-thoughts).

It can be hard to have a healthy relationship with something that feels unavoidable – and while you can take a break from social media, that doesn't make the problems that come with it disappear.

If you're working toward healthier social media use but can't pull yourself away or notice it always making you feel bad about yourself, take a mental health screen at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to see if you may be dealing with symptoms of a mental health condition.



#### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M.J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 1 – A theoretical framework and application to dyadic peer relationships. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21, 267-294. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x>  
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# SOCIAL CONFIDENCE AND CONNECTIONS



Let's face it: growing up is tough. At some point, pretty much everyone struggles with feeling alone, insecure, or like you just don't fit in. Use this worksheet to think through what kind of connections are important to you and how you can make sure you have them in your life.

## Exploring Current Connections

What are times you have felt connected? Were you with certain people, doing a certain activity, or in a certain location?

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What are some things you are proud of yourself for doing in the past to create a stronger sense of belonging?

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Are there friends, loved ones, or pets in your life who make you feel understood? What makes those relationships feel good?

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Connection looks different for everybody. What are some experiences or groups that made you feel like you belonged?

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## Exploring New Connections

Comparing your social life to others' can make you feel more alone or insecure. Let's try looking at this with a different lens.

Regardless of what you see in other's lives, what kind of social life do you want?

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What makes a quality friendship?

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How would you like to spend your time?

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When you look at your thoughts around feeling connected, do you notice any patterns? What are they?

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Are there opportunities to get connected, like a program at your school that you can get involved with?

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## Setting Goals

Think about how you described connection in the section above. Based on that, what is one goal you can set to make your social life feel better?

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What are three steps you can take to meet that goal?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Picture yourself in a year. What would future you look back and be proud of you for doing to create a stronger sense of belonging?

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It can be hard to know if your insecurities or troubles with friends are just a part of growing up or if they're signs of a mental health condition, like anxiety or depression.

If you're putting yourself out there and still feel disconnected from your peers or unhappy with your social life, take a mental health screen at [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org).

# **DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE!**

**If you're struggling to deal with life's challenges and feel like you're at the end of your rope, help is available.**

**Trained crisis counselors can be reached 24/7. Call 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.**



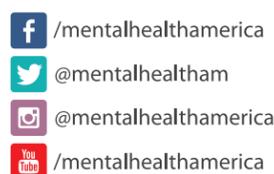
# LIFE CAN BE INTENSE, AND SO CAN THE EMOTIONS THAT COME ALONG WITH IT.

FIND INFO AND TIPS ON HOW TO DEAL AT [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK2SCHOOL](https://mhanational.org/back2school).

IF YOU'RE CONSTANTLY OVERWHELMED BY ALL THE FEELS, YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING THE FIRST SIGNS OF A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION, LIKE DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY.

TAKE THE YOUTH SCREEN AT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. IT'S FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, AND ANONYMOUS.

ONCE YOU GET THE RESULTS, MHA WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH MORE INFORMATION AND HELP YOU TO FIGURE OUT NEXT STEPS.



**IN CRISIS?**

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

# SOCIAL MEDIA CHEAT SHEET

	Overview	Teen Female vs. Male Usage <sup>1</sup>	Minimum Age	Privacy and Safety Features	Things to Consider
 <p><b>TikTok</b></p>	<p>TikTok is used to share and view 1-10 minute long videos including personal thoughts, tutorials, dances, and more.</p>	<p>70% Female 66% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TikTok Digital Well-being                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restricted Mode</li> <li>Family Pairing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TikTok "challenges" can become unsafe or inappropriate for youth and teens</li> <li>While content is reviewed, what some consider appropriate may not be to others</li> <li>Comment sections are often flooded with negative or harmful comments, but users can change video settings to restrict comments on their video</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Snapchat</b></p>	<p>Snapchat allows users to send "snaps" (photos or videos) which will disappear after being viewed.</p>	<p>66% Female 62% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change contact settings                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disable "show me in quick add" setting</li> </ul> </li> <li>Enable "ghost mode" to prevent location sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Snaps disappear after they are viewed, which can make sending hurtful or inappropriate messages easy to get away with</li> <li>Photos or messages can be screenshots or saved in the chat but the sender will be notified</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Instagram</b></p>	<p>Instagram is a platform where you can post and view photos and videos, allowing users to connect with friends, family, brands, celebrities, and influencers.</p>	<p>78% Female 62% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervision option lets parents link their social media accounts to their child's account to supervise activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instagram influencers and celebrities are often followed and idolized by youth and teens                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Posts can perpetuate the image of living "perfect lives"</li> </ul> </li> <li>"Instagram vs. reality" is an important topic to address with young people</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Twitter</b></p>	<p>Twitter is a social media platform designed to connect people and allow them to share their thoughts through short posts called tweets.</p>	<p>20% Female 23% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privacy settings can adjust who can tag, follow, and message users</li> <li>Safety Mode will automatically block abusive language and spam accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twitter is automatically public which makes it easier to interact with strangers                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twitter is permanent and even if accounts are changed to private, tweets sent from a public account remain public</li> </ul> </li> <li>Often used as a way to spread news—with many tragedies occurring daily, it's important to discuss the impact of news and how to cope</li> </ul>
 <p><b>YouTube</b></p>	<p>YouTube is a video sharing platform where users can watch, like, share, comment, and upload their own videos.</p>	<p>80% Female 86% Male</p>	<p>Must be 13 to have own account, but children of all ages may use if enabled by a parent or guardian.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YouTube supervised Google account</li> <li>YouTube Kids app</li> <li>YouTube Family Guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without parental controls, youth can look up virtually anything, including explicit content</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Facebook</b></p>	<p>Facebook allows users to stay connected to others through messages, posts, and videos. Users can discover what's going on in the world, join groups, and share thoughts and life updates.</p>	<p>40% Female 40% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privacy, timeline, and tagging settings can all be changed to help protect user's accounts and safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While Facebook may not be the primary form of social media used by youth anymore, it can be used for cyberbullying and catfishing</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Pinterest</b></p>	<p>Pinterest is a social site where you can collect and share images to "boards," often allowing for discovery of ideas.</p>	<p>30% Female 8% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customizable privacy settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possibility of seeing inappropriate, offensive, or troublesome images (i.e. pictures glorifying eating disorders) on public boards</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Discord</b></p>	<p>Discord is a voice, video, and text chat app organized by topic channels that allows users to talk and hang out with communities and friends.</p>	<p>18% Female 29% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe Direct Messaging can automatically scan and delete direct messages containing explicit content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discord is used by predators to contact youth                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has become increasingly used for cyberbullying</li> </ul> </li> <li>Has been used for criminal activity and spreading troublesome ideologies and explicit content</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Reddit</b></p>	<p>Reddit has many forums where people can share news, pop culture, personal experiences, or other content. Content is socially promoted through site members voting.</p>	<p>7% Female 14% Male</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profile settings can be altered to keep minors more anonymous</li> <li>Privacy settings can be customized</li> <li>Content preferences can disable adult content from being shown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reddit threads are often not based on fact, but on opinion</li> <li>Threads can be filled with gossip, theories, controversial topics, and personal experiences</li> <li>Reddit communities provide space for people to share, but may be unsafe, inappropriate, or triggering for youth to read                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal details of users have been revealed, resulting in harassment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
 <p><b>WhatsApp</b></p>	<p>WhatsApp is a messenger app used to send and receive texts, images, audio, or video via the internet instead of cell phone service.</p>	<p>Data unavailable</p>	<p>13-16 Depending on country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customizable privacy settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Messages from strangers may contain viruses or be scams</li> <li>Can be hard to monitor if "disappearing messages" feature is enabled                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has been used for cyberbullying</li> <li>There is no filter for adult content</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
 <p><b>BeReal</b></p>	<p>BeReal is a photo sharing app that allows you to share photos only once a day. It is designed to show your life without filters in authentic moments.</p>	<p>Data unavailable</p>	<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customizable privacy settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By providing daily snapshots into their actual lives, young people could make it easier for others to figure out their routines and behaviors</li> </ul>