

Of all the age groups, mental health needs are the greatest during adolescence, particularly between the ages of 12 and 16 years. The teen years can be challenging for a lot of kids as they navigate hormonal changes, their sexuality, their identity and pressures to be accepted by their peers.



## Typical developmental milestones for children ages 13 to 18 years:

- They're more aware of body image, appearance, influenced by their peer group and may flip-flop between feeling self-assured and lacking confidence
- They may pull away from parents or caregivers as they strive for independence, be less inclined to share concerns, tend to isolate from family more and want more privacy
- They require more sleep and may exhibit altered sleep patterns, thoughts are becoming more complex, increased ability to express themselves and communicate as well as developing a deeper sense of right and wrong
- As they age, they may have a larger capacity for caring, sharing and develop more meaningful relationships

## It's a good idea to let your pediatrician know if you notice the following:

- Restless, nervous, overly distrusting of others, irritable, defensive, not interested in appearance or activities, changes in sleep or appetite
- They have a new friend group and avoid introducing you to them
- There are issues at school such as poor attendance, school refusal, a drop in grades or trouble at home such as rebelling against rules
- Anger, aggression, irritability, moodiness and anxiety

Depressive and anxiety disorders are the most **common** mental health problems that adolescents face. Self-image issues related to body image and learning problems can worsen anxiety and depression leading to other issues like eating disorders or inappropriate coping strategies like self-harm, inappropriate sexualized behaviors and substance use. Suicide is the **second** leading cause of death for adolescents.



## Great ways to connect with your child between 13 to 18 years:

- **Listening**, getting to know their friends, encouraging and supporting activities/hobbies, respecting their choices and opinions
- **Setting** clear boundaries and expectations around grades, chores, social media, online use and monitoring their online presence
- **Encouraging** your child to set goals, develop skills and be physically active
- **Asking** questions so they know you care while avoiding "W" questions: who, what, when, where, how and why, as this often makes adolescents defensive and less likely to communicate with parents and caregivers
- **Talking** about sensitive subjects such as substance use, alcohol, smoking, peer pressure, sex and suicide in an open and direct manner - asking about suicidal thoughts does not lead to suicide, it makes the child feel better and allows you to provide support
- **Having** meals together as well as promoting healthy eating
- **Encouraging** safe behavior, talking about healthy choices and having a plan to check in while they're out with friends
- **Showing** affection, spending time together, encouraging them to volunteer, celebrating their efforts and accomplishments

Getting help early is better. Never worry alone. Consult your pediatrician.

