

General Mental Wellness • 13 to 18 Years

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.

Frequency Intensity Duration

If you notice changes in the frequency, intensity and duration of your child's behavior or mood, it's important to let your pediatrician know.

List questions and concerns to share with your pediatrician:

How often is it happening? How intense is it? How long does it last?

Are these behaviors impacting your child in school, at home and with friends? Include your child's medications and family mental health history.



Questions/Concerns

If your child is experiencing a mental health crisis or suicidal thoughts, call or text 988, Connecticut's Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

988 offers 24/7/365 access to trained staff who can help in mental health and substance use crises, provide referrals to resources and perform warm transfers to Mobile Crisis Intervention Services or emergency services including Urgent Crisis Centers in your community.

988
SUICIDE & CRISIS

If your child is experiencing a life-threatening situation

Dial 911 immediately





Attention Health Care Provider:

If you have questions or need clinical guidance, ACCESS Mental Health is FREE and available to you.

Call us: Monday-Friday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Hartford Hospital 855.561.7135

Wheeler Clinic, Inc. 855.631.9835

Yale Child Study Center 844.751.8955