

TAMING THE STRESS MONSTER IN ADOLESCENCE

Why we are concerned about today's adolescents?

- Suicide is still leading cause of death among 15-24-year-olds (35%). Also land transport accidents (22%), followed by accidental poisoning including overdoses (4.9%) and assault (2.4%). Of total adolescent deaths, 71% males. (Source: AIHW).
- The Mission Australia Youth Survey 2020 demonstrates four issues of personal concern for 15-19s were coping with stress (43%), mental health (34%), body image (33%) and school or study problems (32.4%).
- ARACY (2018) notes 22.8% of 15-19-year-olds have a probable serious mental illness.
- Several studies show adolescent girls are experiencing greater levels of emotional distress or internalising problems – including a UK study of young adolescents that found the number of girls experiencing emotional problems jumped 55% between 2009 and 2014. Source: Journal of Adolescent Health
- Nearly 1 in 5 teen girls (16-17) surveyed would meet clinical criteria for depression and one fifth of adolescents had “very high or high levels of psychological distress” – The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents
- Around 1 in 10 12-17-year-olds report having self-harmed “at some point”, around three quarters saying they’ve done so in the past year. Around one quarter of teenage girls in the 16-17 year age range reported deliberately injuring themselves at some point in their lives. (Source: The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents report 2015)
- In good news, according to the Australian Secondary Students’ Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSAD), after an overall increase in the prevalence of substance use among secondary students during the 1990s, trends in substance use in ASSAD survey data collected between 2002 and 2017 show a substantial *improvement* in the prevalence of smoking, drinking (including drinking at risky levels), and cannabis use in the adolescent population.
- However, alcohol remains a key risk factor for injury among young people, with one in five drinkers aged 16-17 reporting alcohol-related injuries and one in 10 a regretted sexual experience linked to their drinking. (Source: Michael Livingston, “Trends in non-drinking among Australian Adolescents”, Society for the Study of Addiction, 2014).
- MDMA/Ecstasy use is increasing in popularity with 1 in 20 Year 10s having tried it. And 1 in 6 Australian males and 1 in 10 females aged 16 have tried it. (Source: ASSAD via Paul Dillon, Generation Next 2019).
- In 2017, 20% of 15-19-year-olds surveyed were “extremely or very worried” about family conflict (Source: ARACY 2018).
- In 2018-19, 43,000 young people aged 15-24 presented alone to specialist homelessness agencies. Domestic violence or unstable housing are the two most common reasons given. (Source: Australian Institute of Health & Welfare)
- 93% of boys and over 60% of girls have viewed pornography by 18 (mostly between 14-17) (Source: The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2016).
- The Australian Medical Association pointed in a government submission to their concern that: “Evidence indicates that exposure to and consumption of internet pornography is strongly associated with risky behaviour among adolescents.”
- The Youth Unemployment Rate in Australia remains stubbornly high at just over 11% (compared to the national rate of 5.3%. There are also new challenges to further study. (Source: Foundation for Young Australians) (*post-COVID figures are much higher*)
- About 73% of university graduates were employed four months after graduation in 2018 — the best result since 2014. But 10 years ago, that number was 85%. And only 57% felt their qualification was important for their current employment. (Source: ABC News)

“Adolescents experience more intense urges than children and adults and the mental controls to stop them are in short supply.”
— Sheryl Feinstein, *Parenting the Teenage Brain* (2007).

Main drivers in adolescence

- Seeking autonomy
- Identity searching
- Needing to belong
- Immature brain driving a mature looking body
- Separation from parents
- Forming relationships.

There has always been a generation gap between parents and their adolescents, however, since the new millennium it has become even more of a chasm! Adolescents are still at risk of their immature brain structure until the early-mid 20s.

What’s going on up there in the adolescent brain?

- Overproduction of dendrites and synaptic connections.
- Pruning — use it or lose it!
- Myelination — the process of insulating the neurons and synaptic connections.
- Adolescents are relying on their amygdala rather than the pre-frontal lobe — **flight, freeze or fight** responses are more likely.
- Emotional illiteracy is the norm for many, including intense mood swings and confusion.
- Window of sensitivity.
- Hot cognition.

The world now appears as if through a cracked windscreen.

Adolescents need more sleep than pre-pubescents or adults.

Please share with the adolescents in your life this fantastic article from heysigmund.com:

[THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN — WHAT ALL TEENS NEED TO KNOW](#)

Danger signs of teens at risk

- Isolation from family and friends.
- Sudden changes in schoolwork, job performance or athletic activities.
- Drastic mood swings.
- Lack of interest in outside school activities.
- Family conflict.
- Living in a community with high crime and easy availability of alcohol and drugs.
- Delinquent friends.
- Academic failure.
- Change in eating and sleeping habits.
- Cutting or hurting themselves.

All adolescents need lots of support and encouragement to navigate the bumpy road — the journey from childhood to adulthood. “Lighthouses” are essential for adolescents to make it to the end of the journey — healthy and on track to realise their full potential.

“People who have had a strong connection with a strong positive role model during adolescence are much more resilient throughout their life.”
— Nan Bahr and Diane Pendergast, *The Millennial Adolescent* (2007).

Parents can support adolescents by using caring, empowering communication

- Use words of suggestion not direction
- Avoid shame-based language
- Encourage thinking and making choices
- Lighten up!
- Remember they are temporarily brain impaired
- Choose right time to talk and use door openers
- Avoid using don't — try “next time”
- Ensure they are listening
- Never argue with an adolescent
- Co-parent your teen's friends and vice versa

Keep in mind the emotional barometer – especially the tipping point!

HOME — having a safe base to come to rest, restore and fill their cup is one of the most important protective factors for all children, especially our vulnerable adolescents.

Respectful parent messages that can help

1. Now that's interesting!
2. Have you given that much thought?
3. Why don't you sleep on it?
4. Tell me 'what if'?
5. May I offer a suggestion?
6. How can I support you?

WHAT HELPS THE BRAIN WORK BEST:

1. Oxygen
2. Water
3. Glucose
4. Rest
5. Good quality food
6. Omega 3 fatty-acids
7. Movement
8. Feel good brain chemicals

Doing things you enjoy, which are respectful of yourself and others, creates positive brain chemicals – ie empties the emotional barometer.

Here are some that work:

Athletic success & sport — team and individual

Artistic & creative expression — drama, dance, music, art

Deep relaxation & stillness — calming audios, quiet time at beach

Pets that love unconditionally!

Safe, honest human connection — deep human connectedness, family, friendship

Significant immersion in nature — walking, surfing, fishing, walking the dog

Acts of service — helping others

Discovering new purpose & meaning — starting something new such as gratitude journal, fitness program.

Useful apps and programs

Smiling Mind: A modern meditation app for young people... helps with stress, anxiety, depression, positive thinking and general wellbeing.

The Headspace meditation app is another excellent resource that teaches adolescents how to meditate and then just a few minutes a day.

The Reachout Toolbox helps you set goals and then find the right apps to support you to achieve them.

DeepSleep: Incorporates guided meditation to help overcome insomnia and get to sleep.

Recharge: A six-week program to improve mood, energy and wellbeing by setting better sleep patterns.

SuperBetter: An online game to help you achieve health-related goals by increasing resilience.

The Brave Program: self-help programs for teens to help cope with worry and anxiety.

Break Up Shake Up: Easy, fun things to do to help you cope with a relationship breakup and recover quicker.

Breathe: An app from Reachout to help with physical symptoms of stress and anxiety.

The Check-in app: From beyondblue this app helps you start a conversation with a friend who may be struggling.

MoodGym: Skills for preventing and coping with depression.

Safe on Social: A digital survival toolkit

Good reads

iMinds: How and Why Constant Connectivity is Rewiring Our Brains and What to Do About It by Dr Mari Swingle

ROC and Rise: The teenager's guide to building the resilience, optimism and confidence needed to level up at school, in relationships and life by Claire Eaton

The Everyday Resilience Journal: A pre-teen's guide to friendships, schoolwork and growing up! by Michelle Mitchell

Help for teens

If you need someone to help you feel safe, accepted and heard, please call or visit:

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelp.com.au

Life Line: 131 11 44 or www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Callback Service: 1300 65 94 67 or www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

The following sites also have some fantastic information and resources to help teens navigate a range of issues. Some of these services also offer email or web counselling and live chat.

au.reachout.com

www.eheadspace.org.au

www.youthsuicide.com

www.youthbeyondblue.com

www.youthfocus.com.au

www.drughelp.gov.au

www.headspace.org.au

www.dryes.com.au

“Every teenager has a spark — something that is good, beautiful and useful to the world. Sparks illuminate a young person’s life and give it energy and purpose.”
— Peter. L. Benson PhD, *Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite The Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* (2008)

Adolescence is the best time to tap into a person’s potential.

Watch Maggie’s TEDx Youth@Hale talk with your adolescent.

Exploring the Big Question — Why Am I Here?



Visit: youtube.com/maggiedentauthor to watch the talk and see our playlist of other useful video blogs about adolescence. And you can read some blogs about/for adolescents [here](#). In particular, check out Maggie’s blog: [Beware the Teen Tipping Point](#).

Also for adolescents, we have some great infographics, audios, ebooks and other resources in Your Kit Bag for a Bumpy Ride: <http://www.maggiedent.com/yourkitbag>



To thank you for coming to the seminar, Maggie would like to offer you free access to her Relax and Escape audio track – the perfect track to help you tame that stress monster when it rears its ugly head. [Download now.](#)