The Jed Foundation

How to support the mental health of teens and young adults
The Jed Foundation

• Equipping teens and young adults to navigate mental health challenges, to seek and give help, and to be emotionally prepared to enter adulthood and fulfill their potential

• Partnering with high schools, colleges and universities to strengthen mental health and suicide prevention policies, programs and systems
What do we mean by “Mental Health”?

**Mental health** is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community – WHO

Just as with physical health, mental health is more than just the absence of illness.
Mental health problems are common

- 42 million Americans (18.1%) experience an anxiety disorder in the past year
- 16 million (6.9%) experience an episode of major depression each year
- 6.1 million (2.6%) live with bipolar disorder
- 2.4 million (1.1%) with schizophrenia
- 10.2 million have co-occurring mental health and substance use issues
- 75% of all chronic mental illness begins by age 24
- Of those who suffered with a mental illness last year, 60% did not receive treatment

Source: NAMI
Teens are dealing with a lot. Why?

• Macro-environmental stress or trauma (school shootings, discrimination, economic uncertainty, etc.)
• Sleep deprivation (greater than for previous generations)
• Too little time outside (less than one hour per school day)
• Feeling like they have too much going on
• Pressure to live up to expectations
• Big identity questions while figuring themselves out
• Acutely conscious of fast approaching futures
• Age of expression for emerging mental illness
• Decreasing facetime with friends and more alone time with screens
• Delays in achieving developmental milestones and independent living

Sources: JED, Ad Council, Magnetic Collection, Droga5, AFSP primary research; NEEF
Students of color are experiencing additional stressors

*all differences are statistically significant

College students of color are more resilient and less likely to use drugs or alcohol, though they are also less likely to seek help and to receive treatment for a mental health condition.

Source: JED, Steve Fund, Nielson survey of 1,000 college students
Yet, today’s youth are poised to lead the way on mental health

- They are the most culturally accepting generation
- They’re talking about mental health more than anyone else
- They want honest portrayals and discussions of their experiences with distress and mental health challenges
- They naturally want to help their friends and they go to their friends first when they are in distress

Source: JED, Ad Council, AFSP, Droga5 research
How can adults help?

• Promoting and modeling self-care behaviors
  – Sleep, nutrition, being active, exercise
  – Moderation around alcohol and other potentially harmful behaviors
  – Mindfulness, gratitude exercises, focusing on the positive, pressing pause when overwhelmed
  – Check out www.halfofus.com/presspause and www.loveislouder.com

• Helping teens develop independent living and problem-solving skills
  – Provide increasing opportunities for teens to negotiate the world on their own and advocate for themselves
  – Check out www.settogo.org/for-families/

• Helping teens connect and engage
  – Identify ways to engage peers, mentors, school, athletics, clubs, employment, religion, culture, etc.
How can adults help?

- Checking your own stigma or prejudices about mental health
- Promoting help-seeking as a brave and important behavior
- Creating a caring culture around teens in which everyone belongs and is accepted for who they are
  - Family acceptance of LGBTQ youth predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status; it also protects against depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation and behaviors
- Being thoughtful about what you are valuing and what expectations are important to you and try not to put excess pressure on your teen
- Helping teens identify a support network of trusted adults to whom they and their friends can talk to when they are struggling

Source: Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults; Journal of Psychiatric Nursing.
How can adults help?

• Knowing the signs that a teen may be in distress or have an emerging mental illness and helping educate teens to know the signs as well
• Trusting your own instincts and taking action if you are worried about a teen in your life
• Knowing about crisis support services and sharing those with teens
  – Text to 741-741 (Crisis Text Line)
  – Or call 1-800-273-TALK (National Life Line Service)
• Knowing what school and community resources exist to help teens who are struggling, and sharing these with teens
• Helping teens learn how to notice if a friend is struggling and how to talk that friend
  – Check out [www.seizetheawkward.org](http://www.seizetheawkward.org)
Advice from young people about how to support them when they are struggling

**Do**
- Treat me normally, without judgment
- Be accepting of my struggle
- Use an understanding or empathetic tone
- Open up conversation, offer to listen
- Offer invitations, activities, social inclusion
- Keep checking in, make yourself available
- Set boundaries
- Show me that you care and value me
- Ask open-ended questions
- Take care of yourself
- Involve experts when necessary

**Don’t**
- Freak out about or make light of my situation
- Try to solve my problems
- Use an accusatory or condescending tone
- Demand conversation
- Get offended if I don’t accept
- Disappear on me, without explanation
- Make me feel like a burden
- Give me false praise
- Interrogate me
- Make it about you
- Turn people against me; gossip about me

Source: JED, Ad Council, AFSP, Droga5 research
Signs to notice

You don’t need to be an expert or clinician to notice warning signs -- you just need to trust your observations if you see changes in:

- Appearance
- Mood
- Speech
- Behavior
- Relationships
- Academic Performance
Engage Students by Expressing Concern

• Express your concern and offer a specific example:
  – “You look sad a lot of the time”
  – “You’re taking a lot more naps after school”
  – “It doesn’t seem like you’re interested in making plans with friends”

• Show compassion
  – “I am worried about you”

• Listen
  – You don’t always have to solve problems

• Know your own limits
  – If it is requiring a lot of time, effort or concern on your part that feels beyond what you can do, you might need to get others involved
How to Prepare Your Student for the Transition to College
1st-year college student wish they were better prepared emotionally

77% feel social media, TV, and movies make college seem a lot more fun than it actually is

63% talked to their parents regularly about how they are adjusting to the new lifestyle

45% feel that “it seems like everyone has college figured out but me”

49% feel college is not living up to their expectations

54% said they felt making new friends was a challenge

65% tend to keep their feelings about the difficulty of college to themselves

Source: JED/Nielsen survey of 1,502 1st-year college students
What predicts success after high school?

- **Social-Emotional Skills**: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, cooperative behavior

- **Independent Living Skills**: managing time, managing money, understanding and prioritizing self-care, taking care of health and mental health, knowing when and how to seek help

- **Coping Skills and Resiliency**: Flexibility, emotion regulation, openness to new ideas

- **Self-Knowledge**: Identification of interests and passions, conviction, resistance to peer pressure

- **Fit**: Success in college is closely tied to both emotional well-being and overall “fit” of a school for the student’s personality, preferences, interests, and ambitions
What predicts success in college?

• **Being engaged on campus is most important:**
  – Taking a course with professors who make learning exciting
  – Working with professors who care about students professionally
  – Finding a mentor who encourages students to follow personal goals
  – Working on a project across several semesters
  – Participating in an internship that applies classroom learning
  – Being active in extracurricular activities

College Students Talk about Their Transition Experience
WHAT EVERY FRESHMAN SHOULD KNOW...
Encourage Your Student to Develop a Self-Care Plan

- Practice stress management techniques
- Explore fitness, yoga, meditation & other wellness facilities & activities on campus
- Investigate activities & extra-curriculars of interest in advance
- Connect with relevant club/activity leaders in advance
- Learn how to balance academic workload
- Connect with other students on campus
- Find mentors & advisers
- Plan how to manage health on campus
Self-care for emotional well-being

By adopting relatively simple habits, you can help yourself feel better and improve your state of mind:

• Building positive relationships
• Sleeping well
• Staying active
• Eating healthy foods
• Taking steps to manage stress-work/life/leisure balance
• Engaging in your community
• Mindfulness
• The power of positivity
Your Communication Agreement

• Contact may be more frequent during the transition – this shouldn’t be alarming

• Set some basic guidelines:
  – What decisions and challenges do you expect your child to be able to handle alone?
  – At what point should your child ask for help?
  – Under what circumstances would your child want a friend or roommate to call you?

• Pay special attention to changes:
  – Feeling sad or anxious during the transition may be normal but any changes in things like eating, sleeping, communication habits should not be ignored

• Talk about your “communication contract” in advance and re-visit, evaluate, and shift as needed
Information Privacy

• When a student turns 18:
  • Information about your student’s medical care, including care received at the school’s health and counseling centers, and academic information is private
  • There are some exceptions to that, which you can read about in the JED/NAMI “Starting the Conversation” guide

• We recommend:
  – Over the summer before your student starts college, review the JED/NAMI guide and have a conversation about it with your student
What to Do if You or Someone You Know is Struggling Emotionally at College

- Encourage your student to:
  - Call the campus counseling or health center
  - Request a confidential conversation with your resident advisor if you are in a campus residence hall
  - Talk with the dean of student affairs, peer support specialist, or campus chaplain
  - Request a confidential conversation with your academic advisor or a faculty member
  - If experiencing suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255) or by texting the Crisis Text Line at 741741
Your guide to the transition from high school to college and adulthood.

Preparing for college is more than just academics and testing. Being emotionally ready creates the greatest opportunity for success.

www.settogo.org
Stay up to date on Set to Go content & activities!

Sign up at settogo.org/email
Thank you.

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