Key points

- Good mental health is important for pre-teen and teenage developme–nt, strong relationships and resilience.
- Strong and loving relationships can have a direct and positive influence on pre-teen and teenage mental health.
- Physical health is key to mental health. Encourage teenagers to stay active, eat well, sleep, and avoid alcohol and other drugs.
- If you're concerned about your child's mental health, start by talking with your child.
- There are many support options for pre-teens and teenagers with mental health problems.

V TEM DELU BESEDILA NAJDI ANGLEŠKE BESEDE ZA:

ODPORTNOST	RAZVOJ	RAZMERJA
IZOGIBATI SE	PODPORA	PSIHOLOŠKO ZDRAVJE

What is pre-teen and teenage mental health?

Mental health is a way of describing psychological, social and emotional wellbeing.

Your child needs good mental health to develop well, build strong relationships, adapt to change and deal with life's challenges.

Pre-teens and teenagers who have good mental health often:

- feel happier and more positive about themselves and enjoy life
- bounce back from upsets and disappointments
- have healthier relationships with family and friends
- do physical activity and eat a healthy diet
- get involved in activities
- have a sense of achievement
- can relax and get a good night's sleep
- feel like they belong to their communities.

TRUE OR FALSE?

- Getting enough sleep can have a positive effect on your mental health.
- Healthy teenagers are more open to participating in more activities.
- Happy teenagers are disappointed a lot of times.
- Happy people have a lot of opportunities to feel good about themselves.
- We all prefer to no be accepted by our community.

Adolescence can be a risky period for mental health problems because teenagers are going through many changes and challenges in a short period of time. This all happens while teenage brains are still maturing.

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Promoting good pre-teen and teenage mental health

Your love and support and a strong relationship with you can have a direct and positive influence on your child's mental health. It can even reduce the chances of your child experiencing mental health problems.

Here are ideas to promote your child's mental health and wellbeing:

(MARK WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU FROM 1-5)

- Show love, affection and care for your child in ways that your child likes – for example, your child might like hugs, smiles, pats on the back or quiet time together.
- Show that you're interested in what's happening in your child's life. Praise your child's efforts as well as their good points and achievements. Value your child's ideas and opinions.
- Enjoy spending time together one on one with your child and also as a family.
- Encourage your child to talk about feelings with you. It's important for your child to feel they don't have to go through things on their own. If you work together on solving problems, it can stop things building up.
- Talk to trusted family members, friends, other parents or teachers if you have any concerns. If you feel you need more help, speak to your GP or another health professional.

Physical health is a big part of mental health. To help your child stay emotionally and physically healthy, encourage your child to do the following:

(MARK WHAT YOU DO, AND WHAT YOU DON'T)

- Keep active. Physical fitness will help your child stay healthy, have more energy, feel confident, manage stress and sleep well.
- Develop and maintain healthy eating habits.
- Get enough regular sleep. Pre-teens need 9-11 hours of sleep and teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep a night. Quality sleep will help your child to manage a busy life, stress and responsibilities.
- Balance screen time and digital technology use with other activities that are good for development.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol and other drugs are a major risk factor for teenage mental health problems. You should encourage your child to avoid drugs, and don't give your child opportunities to drink alcohol until they're 18 years old. If you know your child is using alcohol or other drugs and you're worried, talk with your child. Also consider speaking to a health professional or counsellor.

Signs pre-teens and teenagers might need help with mental health

It's normal for children and teenagers to sometimes have low moods, poor motivation and trouble sleeping. These things aren't always the signs of a mental health problem. But if you

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notice any of the following signs and the **signs go on for more than a few weeks**, it's important to talk with your child. The next step is to get professional help.

For children **younger than 12 years**, mental health warning signs might include:

- sadness a lot of the time
- a drop in school performance
- ongoing worries or fears
- aches and pains that don't go away quickly
- loss of appetite or being picky with food
- problems fitting in at school or getting along with other children
- consistently aggressive, threatening, destructive, angry or violent behaviour
- sleep problems, including nightmares.

FIND SIMILAR MEANING:

Weight loss:

Depression:

Insomnia:

Agression:

Low school grades:

Anxiety:

For children **12 years and older**, watch out for your child:

- seeming down, feeling things are hopeless, being tearful or lacking motivation
- having trouble coping with everyday activities
- showing sudden changes in behaviour, often for no obvious reason
- having trouble eating or sleeping
- doing less well at school, or suddenly refusing to go to school, TAFE or work
- avoiding friends or social contact
- saying they have physical pain – for example, headache, stomach ache or backache
- being aggressive or antisocial – for example, missing school, getting into trouble with the police, fighting or stealing
- being very anxious about weight or physical appearance, losing weight or failing to gain weight as they grow.

If your child tells you they're thinking about self-harm or suicide, seek urgent professional help. Call Lifeline on 131 114, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also call 000 or go straight to a hospital emergency department.

Talking with pre-teens and teenagers about mental health

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If you're concerned about your child's mental health, **start by talking with your child**. Talking with your child about how they're feeling shows your child they're not alone and that you care. Also, your child might need your help to get professional support.

Here are ideas to encourage your child to talk with you about how they're feeling:

- Say that even adults have problems they can't sort out on their own. Point out that it's easier to get help when you have support.
- Tell your child that it's common for young people to feel worried, stressed or sad. Also tell your child that opening up about personal thoughts and feelings can be scary.
- Tell your child that talking about a problem can often put things into perspective and make feelings clearer. Someone with more or different experience – like an adult – might be able to suggest options your child hasn't thought of.
- Suggest other people your child could talk with if they don't want to talk with you – for example, aunts or uncles, close family friends, a trusted sports coach or religious leader, an elder or your GP.
- Let your child know that talking with GPs or other health professionals is confidential. These professionals can't tell anyone else, unless they're worried about your child's safety or someone else's safety.
- Emphasise that your child isn't alone. You'll be there whenever your child is ready to talk.

Many pre-teens and teenagers won't seek help themselves. It might take patience and encouragement for your child to feel comfortable seeking help.

For example, if you raise your concerns with your child, they might refuse any help or say there's nothing wrong. So you might need to say that you're worried about them and **you'll be trying to get professional advice**. If you make an appointment and your child won't come, you might need to go on your own.

If you're not sure what to do, a GP or school counsellor is a good place to start.

Getting help for pre-teen and teenage mental health problems

Mental health problems are unlikely to get better on their own. And poor mental health or unmanaged mental health problems can affect your child's wellbeing, physical health, schoolwork, relationships and development – social, physical, educational and vocational.

This means it's important to **get professional help as soon as possible**. Mental health problems do respond well to treatment.

There are **many professional support options**, including:

- your GP
- school counsellors
- psychologists and counsellors
- social workers
- your local community health centre
- local or state or territory mental health services.

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If you don't know where to go, your GP will be able to guide you to the most appropriate services for your family.

Poor mental health is **no-one's fault**, and no-one is to blame.

Looking after yourself, especially your physical and emotional wellbeing, is good for you. It can help you stay calm and consistent when things get tough, which is good for your child too. You can find support options for yourself on our mental health links and resources page. You could also call a parenting helpline in your state or territory.

Pre-teen and teenage mental health conditions

If your child's mental health problems are interfering significantly with their life, a qualified professional might diagnose a mental health condition.

You can read more about how to recognise adolescent mental health conditions and seek help in the following articles:

- Depression: pre-teens and teenagers
- Anxiety disorders: pre-teens and teenagers
- Obsessive compulsive disorder in children and teenagers
- Conduct disorder in children and teenagers
- Eating disorders: pre-teens and teenagers.

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