

insights



Five forgotten mental health habits to promote in young people

by Michael Grose



Young adolescents are at increased risk of experiencing mental health problems including anxiety and depression. Now is the time to make good mental health habits a priority for your young person. And while there's been a great deal written about mental health habits recently, here are five habits worth developing that often go under the radar.

1. Maintain at least two friendships groups

Navigating social groups can be hard work for children at this stage. It helps to have a set of friends outside school to act as a buffer if friendship difficulties arise at school. Encourage your young person to maintain different friendship groups rather than opt for just one or two special friends.

2. Provide a space of their own

Young people of this age need a space of their own at home – somewhere that they can reflect on and process events. We all need this, but the need seems greater during this stage.

3. Talk about their troubles

A problem shared is a problem halved. Talking about what's worrying you is a great way to remove the burden of worry and reduce anxiety. Gently encourage your child to be open with you, or to at least share their concerns with a trusted friend.



4. Develop interests that energise rather than drain

Encourage your young person to have a hobby or activity that energises them, refreshes them and takes them away from the stresses of everyday life. These types of activities include sport, art, music and collecting. They are generally physically healthy or creative activities that enable a young person to relax and get away from their normal routines. Having opportunities to relax and get away from the stress of everyday life is essential.

5. Make mealtimes regular

There's a strong correlation between good mental health in young people and families that have a minimum of five shared mealtimes each week. As their life becomes busier and increasingly taken up with peers, school and outside interests, a regular meal with the family provides young people with the opportunity to catch up with their parents and siblings. Shared meals also provide parents with the chance to assess their young person's mental health in an unobtrusive way.



There's never a better time than the present to foster good mental health habits in young people. But of course if you're concerned about your young person's ongoing mental health, see your GP, a school councillor or a health professional.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's the author of 10 books for parents including Thriving! and the best-selling Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It, and his latest release Spoonfed Generation: How to raise independent children.