



MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT YOUTH ARE EXPERIENCING AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

The Bottom Line

Many youth have been experiencing negative mental health during COVID-19, most of which stems from isolation, anxiety, and missed opportunities. During this time, youth have also shown resilience by using this time to work on themselves.

Mental Health of Youth During COVID-19

Feelings Experienced by Youth:

- New or increased social anxiety
- General anxiety
- Depression
- Fear
- Loneliness and isolation
- Irritation with those with whom they live
- Risk of prolonged abuse
- Negative body image
- Suicidal ideation
- Stress

Mental Health Among Youth (April 2020):

- 72% of girls and 55% of boys aged 12-17 reported feeling sad often or sometimes.
- 18% of youth aged 14-27 reported suicidal thoughts.
- 89% of youth aged 12-14 reported feelings of happiness “often or sometimes”.
- 50% of youth who have experienced mental health challenges reported lifestyle benefits, including time to improve self-reflection and self-care.

KidsHelpPhone Has Experienced:

- March-May 2020:
 - 63% increase in support accessed by text
 - 55% increase in support accessed by phone call
 - 67% of conversations included eating and body image.
 - 30% of conversations included anxieties over COVID-19.

Mental Health Among Youth (August 2020):

- Service providers working with trauma-impacted youth aged 16-24 who experienced homelessness at some point in their lives have reported:
 - 91% increase in youth feeling lonely/isolated;
 - 85% increase in anxiety;
 - 75% increase in depression;
 - 35% increase in suicidal ideation.

Possible Responses

In collaboration with the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Social Services and First Nations University of Canada, Student Mercedes Redman illuminates the hardships youth in care are facing in Saskatchewan during COVID-19. Redman speaks with youth in group homes and foster care about their experiences with the challenges of mental health, the importance of self-care, and the challenges of education since COVID-19 in a this podcast. The podcast was created in an effort to give youth in care a voice and a chance to share their own narratives. The youth have foregrounded the following:

- You are not alone. Feelings of anxiety, frustration with those with whom you live, and isolation are all normal feelings right now. Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
- Try to see things through a 'glass half full lens'. Use this time to master self-care and become the best version of yourself. Taking a break from people may be a good thing.
- Keep an open dialogue. This is especially important with younger children. Access to media may mean children are being overwhelmed with frightening information, some of which may be inaccurate. Have open, honest, and direct conversations with children about their anxieties and provide factual age-appropriate information.
- Keep busy. Older youth may want to try new things they have always wanted to do but never had the time for, such as setting fitness goals or learning a new language. For younger children, plan fun activities such as scavenger hunts or arts and crafts.
- Stick to a routine. Structure can be very beneficial for restoring a sense of normalcy and control. Try to avoid sleeping all day or veering too far off from a regular routine. Exercising, relaxing, eating, learning, and enjoying entertainment should all be done in moderation with structure. Try setting a routine and schedule that is easy to stick to.
- Reduce pressure on yourself. Allow yourself to grieve missed opportunities. It is okay to feel sad and frustrated about the social effects of COVID-19. Take care of yourself first; COVID-19 is not a productivity competition. Isolation and the switch to online education has been difficult for many. Reduce expectations you have placed on yourself.

Possible Responses (Continued)

- Try not to shut down. Isolation can be very psychologically harmful, especially for youth with pre-existing mental health challenges. Try to wake up every morning and get dressed for the day. Avoid sleeping excessive hours or refraining from interactions with others. Doing even one productive thing a day can be very rewarding.
- Use technology wisely. Gather information from reliable news outlets. Use technology to watch or attend virtual powwows, artist's online performances, and foster connections. Remember to go outside and enjoy nature. Social media is beneficial as it keeps people connected to their communities; however, it can be used inappropriately as a coping mechanism and may also lead to negative feelings if it is not used in moderation.
- The health of caregivers matters. Developing healthy coping mechanisms becomes much more simple for children and youth when they witness their caregivers taking care of their own mental health.



For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca

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