

Stigma and privacy: Many adolescents face stigma related to sensitive topics like sexual health, mental health, or substance use. Confidentiality helps to protect their privacy and reduce their fear of judgement or discrimination, encouraging them to seek necessary support.

Safety consideration: If the adolescent is at risk of harm or harming others, healthcare providers will discuss with the adolescent on the best way to share the information with their caregivers while keeping the adolescent safe and supported.

Tips for parents and caregivers on communication with adolescents on difficult topics

While adolescents may seem “grown up” already, the involvement of supportive and trusting adults in their lives is essential for their wellbeing and growth. Having a parental figure or trusted adult is important to demonstrate good health habits, healthy relationships, and effective communication.

Difficult conversations cover topics that may be embarrassing, upsetting, or controversial for you or your adolescent. Common topics include sex, drugs, self-harm, social media use and mental health. Tackling difficult conversations with your adolescent can help to build trust and keep your relationship close and encourage your adolescent to be more open in future conversations.



Preparing for difficult conversations with adolescents

Think through the difficult conversations and raise them before your adolescent asks.

Managing difficult conversations

Stay calm. Be honest if you are shocked by the topic but reassure your adolescent that you are happy to discuss the issue.

Listen to your adolescent and avoid criticism or judgment. Oftentimes, adolescents are not expecting you to fix things, but for someone to listen to them.

Next steps

Set aside some time every day to listen to your adolescent. You can engage in regular discussions with your adolescent on the social media content that they consume and guide them on how to manage their social media, as well as how to respond to various situations. You can also provide information about sex and healthy relationships for adolescents and correct false ideas that adolescents may get from friends or social media.

Taking special interest in adolescents’ hobbies and interests are important for staying connected with your adolescent and to shape positive lifestyle habits.

If you are concerned about your child’s mental health or risk behaviours, it is important to encourage them to get timely help from school counsellors, community counsellors, or doctors.

Useful websites on communication with adolescents:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au>
www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/talk-to-your-teenager/

Useful counselling helplines:

Resources	Contact No
Samaritans Of Singapore (SOS)	1767 / 91511767 (WhatsApp)
TOUCH Community Services	63770122
Family Service Centre (FSC)	1800-838-0100
Community Development Council (CDC)	1800-344-1234
Tinker Friend	1800-377-2252

Useful Counselling Services:

SHINE Youth & Children Services
<https://www.shine.org.sg/resilience>

Limitless Singapore
<https://www.limitless.sg/depression>

Wysa Chatbot
<https://www.mindline.sg/wysa-chat>

Mindline Singapore
<https://mindline.sg/youth/home>

Useful telephone number

Central Appointments 6294-4050



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Supporting Adolescent Health and Development



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Adolescence ranges from ages 10 to 19 and is an important phase of life between childhood and adulthood that sets the foundation for good health in adulthood. It is essential to recognise that adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes that can affect how they think and feel, which can significantly impact their health behaviours.

Empowering adolescents to actively participate in decisions regarding their health is crucial for fostering independence and responsibility. When adolescents are involved in decisions about their health, they learn to make informed choices, understand consequences, and take ownership of their wellbeing. This involvement also builds confidence and prepares them to manage their health as they transition into adulthood.

Healthy adolescents’ growth and development entails changes in three main areas:

Physical Health

Encouraging adolescents to adopt healthy habits are important for their health, growth, and development.

Nutrition and Hydration

Healthy eating habits formed during adolescence are important as they set the foundation for overall wellbeing and development. Adolescents often feel hungrier and eat more as their bodies undergo puberty and growth spurts. They require a balanced diet of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals to support their growth. It is important to avoid skipping meals while limiting the intake of processed foods, and to stay hydrated by drinking enough water while limiting carbonated and/or sugary drinks.

Activity

Regular exercise is important for building strong bones and muscles, maintaining a healthy heart and cardiovascular system, as well as improving mental health, academic performance, and sleep. It is recommended for adolescents to participate in an average of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day, and engage in muscle and bone strengthening exercises 3 times a week.



Sleep

It is common for adolescents to start wanting to go to bed later at night and get up later in the morning, as their sleep hormone (melatonin) starts to secrete later at night, which affects their sleep-wake cycle. Adolescents require 8-10 hours of quality sleep a night to concentrate better in school and for their overall growth and health. Limiting mobile device usage, avoiding caffeinated drinks, and establishing regular sleep patterns and bedtime routines (e.g. listening to relaxing music and showering before they sleep) are good sleeping habits to help adolescents get the rest they need.

Mental Health

Good mental health is important for all adolescents to feel positive about themselves, build strong relationships with family and friends, adapt to change, and be involved in activities. Staying physically healthy is an important part of having good mental health. Emotional ups and downs are a common part of adolescence, as they begin to experience more complex emotions and are trying to understand and manage them.



Some youth may face mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders as they are going through many changes and challenges in a short period of time.

Psychosocial Development

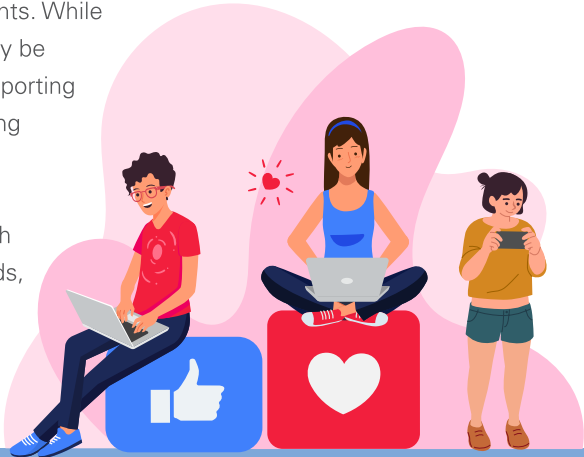
During adolescence, young people strengthen their communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills to navigate more complex social dynamics and develop stronger relationships.

Friendships and romantic relationships

Positive friendships are important to adolescents to provide them with confidence, support, and a sense of belonging. Teenage romance and relationships are an important part of development and may involve exploring physical intimacy, attraction, and sexual identity. Providing guidance, support, and acceptance are important for your adolescents’ development, self-acceptance, and wellbeing.

Screen time and social media

Screen time and use of digital technology can be part of a healthy lifestyle when it is balanced with other activities that are important for adolescent development and wellbeing. These activities include physical activities, socialising, and getting adequate sleep. The use of social media is a big part of social and creative life for adolescents. While social media may be beneficial in supporting learning, fostering new interests, and maintaining connections with family and friends, they can also pose risks.



Risks involve cyberbullying, social isolation, posting compromising photos or content online, and meeting inappropriate people online. Talking with your adolescent is the best way to protect them from social media risks and ensure their safety.

Risk behaviours

Taking risks is a typical part of growing up, exploring limits, and testing one’s abilities. Adolescents tend to make impulsive decisions as the adolescent brain does not fully mature until about 25 years of age. They may experiment with substances such as tobacco, alcohol, vape, and recreational drugs due to curiosity and/or peer pressure, to feel a sense of belonging to a group. Such risk behaviours can have serious harmful effects on their physical and mental health, along with legal implications. It is important to encourage your adolescent to think about consequences and staying safe.



Importance of confidentiality between adolescents and healthcare providers

It is important that your adolescent sees their healthcare provider alone for part of the clinic visit and that the contents of their discussion are not routinely shared with parents or caregivers. Confidentiality with their healthcare providers is essential for adolescents, to support their development, promote honest communication, and protect their rights to privacy for quality healthcare provision.

Trust and communication: When adolescents feel assured that their information will be kept confidential, they are more likely to discuss sensitive concerns such as mental health, substance use or relationships.