

Tips for parents and guardians to promote adolescent wellness

1. Assist your adolescent in cultivating perspective

Remember your adolescent is a holistic person not just an academic being. They take on many roles: learner, friend, family member, sports team member, etc. Encourage them to nurture each of these roles and to not just focus on their role of being learner.

When assessment periods come, learners often feel like school is their entire life. Remind them that assessments are just a period in time and encourage them to plan something to look forward to, after the assessment time to help them see this perspective.

Remember we are still in Covid times and with these times we are faced with continuous change and a lot of uncertainty. Many families have experienced loss: loss of family members and friends, loss of jobs, loss of income, loss of connection with others and loss of participation in activities. Encourage your adolescents to be kind to themselves, to take time to process the changes they are experiencing and the impact these changes are having on their lives.

It can be hard for teenagers to process these changes on their own, normalise this and encourage them to reach out for assistance. We can only try and minimise or avoid the stressors we are facing for a period of time. We all reach a point where it gets too much and it impacts on our daily lives and our ability to function more and more.

Our teenagers sit with many worries and stressors that require attention and at the same time many tasks that they need to do, both at home and at school. Encourage them to write all of these down and prioritise what needs to be addressed now and what can wait until later. This enables them to regain a sense of control by acknowledging where they are at and by providing them with a starting point for action.

It is also important to acknowledge that with Covid many of our adolescent's may not be able to utilise their normal go to coping mechanisms e.g participation in sport or de-stressing at social gatherings. In such situations we need to encourage our teenagers to brainstorm alternative healthy coping mechanisms rather than take on unhealthy ones.

2. Connect authentically with your adolescent and encourage them to connect authentically with others

Have regular check in times with your adolescent. Be present during this time. Turn your phone onto silent and turn off any other distractions. They appreciate it when you set aside time for them. Enquire about all aspects of their lives, not just their academics. Be slow to speak, and long to listen. Give them space to share rather than focus on your agenda. Be a sound board; allow them to give solutions rather than be quick to problem solve for them as this aids them to develop their resiliency muscle.

Remind your teenager to not neglect relationships. Living life in community is a fundamental human need and is essential for our overall well-being.

Encourage them to keep reaching out. Our lives during Covid have become more isolated. It is important to connect with and support each other. Let people know how you are really doing and be intentional about finding out how they are really doing.

There has been an increase in anxiety, especially social anxiety and depression in adolescence during Covid. Encourage your adolescent to reach out if they are not coping or if they notice any changes in the way that they are relating with others.

Your adolescent is welcome to make an appointment with one of the school social workers and you are also welcome to call them at school or send an email if you would like any further input regarding supporting your adolescent.

3. Encourage your adolescent to act intentionally

Encourage your adolescent to set realistic goals. When setting goals, think about aspects such as capacity, time, and resources and break these goals down into manageable steps. Encourage your adolescent to set their own goals, rather than impose your goals on them. Encourage them to set goals that don't just focus on their role of being a learner.

Many learners fear disappointing their parents, remember to affirm them in the things they are excelling in, and not just their academic performance – remember they're holistic.

Ensure that your adolescent takes care of their body by getting enough sleep, not skipping breakfast and if possible, provide healthy food options where you can.

Encourage them to exercise - studies have shown that doing a regular form of exercise releases endorphins that counteract the stress hormone cortisol, which helps bring a wobbly, everything-is-falling-apart mood, into balance. It

is helpful to try and do something active after school before they study to re-energize after the long school day.

Lastly, ensure that your adolescent takes time to unwind and make time for the things that they enjoy outside of school. This will enable them to keep pressing on when life gets more stressful.