

SPRING 2017

TEENS AND MENTAL HEALTH



Good mental health practices are important for everyone but especially for teens. Teens are experiencing growth spurts not only of their bodies but their brains, highs and lows of emotions unlike childhood, and an orientation to their friends and influences online. The teenage brain is more adaptive, open to exploration, more receptive to novelty, subject to hormonal “power surges” that flood the brain with estrogen or testosterone and is essentially a turbo-charged car with an inexperienced driver. Most students I know lack adequate sleep (9 hours a night is recommended) and that by itself leads to distraction and poor decision making. On top of that discernment, executive and logical thinking isn’t fully developed until the late teens to mid 20’s.

One in five High School students is dealing with a mental health issue, either struggling or diagnosed, and if left untreated this can lead to the development of long-term unhelpful patterns of thinking and acting. Early recognition and help is important.

The most common mental health issues for teens are Anxiety, Depression, Conduct Disorders, Addictions (including gaming and pornography) and Psychosis. For more information about the symptoms and warning signs for these, go to www.mindcheck.ca. This is a website designed for teens so they can inform themselves about these issues, and find coping skills and other resources. Parents can check out kelymentalhealth.ca for information and resources for themselves and find ways to support their teen.

The most important mental health strategies are:

1) Adequate sleep (preferably 9 hours per night during the night, and good sleep hygiene (no screens one hour before bed and none in the bedroom, regular hours of

sleep, finish homework early, do something positive and calming before sleep)

2) Nutritious food on a regular schedule. Breakfast (with protein) is essential for good thinking.

3) Positive social support and encouragement: parents, relatives, other caring adults, and solid friendships with at least one good peer. Negativity, criticism, lecturing and “telling them what to do” does not help them develop the skills they need. Adults can take more of a listening and coaching role, helping them see the problem from different angles and generate and evaluate their own ideas on how to solve it.

4) Regular exercise which helps burn off the stress chemicals that can build up in the body.

5) Have good strategies to help yourself calm down. Breathing, withdrawing from a high conflict situation until you can form a strategy to address it, take a break, eat something nutritious and drink some water, do something active, find a friend who listens.

6) Develop good negotiation and conflict resolution skills aiming for win/win solutions.

7) Develop an attitude of gratitude and as much as possible embrace forgiveness, kindness and compassion as a way of life.

8) Ask for help. Kely Mental Health is a BC organization designed to support teens and families dealing with mental health issues. Find out what is available locally.

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RENEW THE MIND

THINK GOD'S THOUGHTS AFTER HIM

Negative thought patterns.

Obsessing. Ruminating. Black and white thinking. "Reading" someone else's mind. Predicting the future. Jumping to conclusions. Catastrophizing. In our busy lives we easily develop negative thinking patterns, unawares. When unchecked they become ruts, traps, even strongholds. Hence, *the ability to catch automatic negative thoughts is a life transforming skill.*

Luther's thoughts were re-structured: the rest is (Reformation) history.

On the basis of what Martin Luther himself tells us, he suffered from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and major depressive disorder. His distorted thoughts (resulting in rapid heart beat, shortness of breath, chest pains, dizziness, numbness and nausea) resulted in years of physical, mental and spiritual agony. His suffering ended when he took captive one single thought: *'the righteous shall live by faith'. (Rom. 1:17).* Luther became a new man and over time God used him to change negative thought patterns of millions of people.

Our life is what our thoughts make it.

God designed us to know our thoughts, to examine them and to keep or discard them. The significance of this ability cannot be over-emphasized. Research confirms that most mental and physical illness (anxiety, depression, fear, addiction) are results from toxic thought patterns.

Think of a single thought as a piece of mental real estate. Just like a well-kept neighborhood increases the curb-side appeal of your own property, balanced, realistic thoughts control the brain's activity, with *positive* results, joy... peace... patience... kindness... gentleness.... goodness... self-control... faithfulness... love

Here's a thought experiment:

1. Dwell on this realistic thought for 5 minutes: "I can learn to control my negative, runaway thoughts."
2. Ask yourself: Do I notice any positive change in my thoughts, mood, emotion or behavior?

Scripture Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy serves to connect the dots between situations, core beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.

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ARE YOU THERE FOR ME?

Couples are forever asking the basic question, "Are you there for me?," so says author and therapist, Sue Johnson in her book, "Hold Me Tight." This is such a powerful yearning, to know that our loved one is truly "there" for us. We all want to know that there is at least one person out there who truly, "has our back." If there is one person that we desire to be "on our side," it is our partner. The word "partner" is a fitting descriptor of our loved one, for that person is a part of us, a person who stands beside us and supports us.

Sue Johnson says that all of us have a wired-in need for reliable emotional connection. The three keys to this reliable emotional connection are that we are: open, attuned, and responsive to one another. In conflict, we tend to close off to one another and/or we view our partner as the enemy or threat.

Healthy relationships stay open to what the other person is saying. They notice the other person's feelings and body postures and pay attention to them. Healthy partners respond to rather than react to what their partner is saying. If you find that you are reacting more than responding, then you probably are closed off to your partner or have emotionally shut down. Instead we want to be responsive to our partner, attempting to see things from their point of view and considering their opinion to the point where we allow it to influence our own. If you find that your partner has shut down, then seek them out. Try to understand your partner and convey comfort and care when you see that your partner is distressed.

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