



**HELPING
ADOLESCENTS
THRIVE**

Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents

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Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive

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Foreword

Adolescence is one of the most rapid and formative phases of human development. During this time adolescents develop knowledge and social-emotional skills and acquire attributes and abilities that are important for assuming adult roles and active contribution to society. Up to 50% of all mental health conditions start before the age of 14 years and up to one in five adolescents experience a mental disorder each year. Suicide is one of the three leading causes of death among older adolescents. In turn, poor adolescent mental health is associated with a range of high-risk behaviours, including self-harm, tobacco, alcohol and substance use, risky sexual behaviours and exposure to violence, the effects of which persist throughout the life-course and have serious implications.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the well-being of young people and has put them at an increased risk of suicide, substance use and other mental health problems. Young people themselves report that their greatest concern is the toll that the pandemic is taking on their mental health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is committed to support Member States in promoting mental health and well-being towards achievement of target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This guidance, aimed at informing adolescent mental health and preventing mental health conditions, self-harm, substance use and other high-risk behaviours, is the first product of the Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) package that will be complemented by a series of implementation tools such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)/WHO HAT toolkit on programmatic guidance. The HAT package will support the operationalization of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030), which recognizes adolescents as being central to achieving the SDGs, and facilitate country action in line with the recommendations of the *Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!): guidance to support country implementation*, developed by WHO in partnership with other United Nations organizations. It will also contribute to the implementation of WHO's comprehensive *Mental health action plan 2013–2020* (which has been extended to 2030), which identifies child and adolescent mental health as a priority area.

This guidance is a milestone for translating opportunities for mental health promotion and disease prevention into action. It provides evidence-based recommendations on promotive and preventive psychosocial interventions for adolescents aged 10–19 years, which can be implemented in schools, health care settings, communities or through digital platforms. Particular attention is given to adolescents who are at increased risk for mental disorders or self-harm, and adolescents who present early signs and/or symptoms of emotional and/or behavioural problems. The HAT guidelines will thus support improved adolescent well-being and functioning, and help to reduce suffering due to mental health conditions and self-harm in adolescents.

We encourage governments, education, health and other service planners, along with young people and their families, to use these guidelines as a tool for promoting adolescent mental health and well-being.

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