



Ideas on How to Improve Mental Health for Teens

Produced by Buddies Without Borders Online Forum
- Management of COVID-19 and Its Impact on Students

September 7, 2020

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Covid-19 has impacted the mental health of teens tremendously across the world. While each country and each school may have different challenges and resources, we brainstormed a variety of ways to combat this crisis - some of these recommendations are best practices we collected, and some are simply ideas based on our own reflections and observations. We hope the respective authorities will consider these proposals and help teens around the world to achieve better mental health.

- Mrs. Yihung Mohs, Chief Executive Director, Global Education Destinations

ON THE SCHOOL LEVEL

1. We propose schools establish Mental Health as a standard course in their academic schedule.
 - Manage and assess students' mental health progress closely in the same way as one would with their academic performance.
 - Conduct the mental health class once a week with standardized content across the entire school system.
 - Cover the following content:
 - Establish the fact that Mental Health requires work and is relevant to all of us. Eliminate stigma around mental health.
 - Train teens how to identify symptoms in selves and friends, as well as how to provide peer support and when to report to an adult.
 - Help teens understand potential causes, and it is not their fault.
 - Provide questionnaires to self-diagnose, and the follow-up actions one can take to seek help.
 - Create support circles and enable teens to share tips and advice.
 - Develop skills in:
 - Time Management
 - Sleep Schedule
 - Routines and Habits
 - Self Discovery
 - Communication
 - For course material:
 - Make contacting counselors as easy as possible
 - Make mental health related educational articles and videos readily available
2. We propose schools gauge students' workload regularly and adjust accordingly when possible.
 - Send frequent questionnaires on the workload, schedule, methodology, online/offline time management, etc. and adjust the homework requirements based on the response.

- Maintain some synchronized learning which promotes socialization, but also schedule extra offline time for homework - especially when subject teachers cannot coordinate timing of their assignments.
3. We propose that classes like Physical Education, Music, and Arts to be continued.
 - Go Outdoors: For example, for Arts, students could paint the parking lot of the school while maintaining social distancing. For Sports, teens can do yoga in a field or go running.
 - Yoga via zoom or google meets or face-to-face with social distancing measures in place. (<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/13-benefits-of-yoga#section1>)
 4. We think it is a good idea if our teachers can do the following:
 - Give students time outside of lectures to work in groups.
 - After each school day, make available “tutor hours” or “resource hours” by subject so that students who need extra support can join.
 - Make small group meetings available.
 - “Gamify” lesson plans.
 - Set up a reward system to encourage student participation.
 - Incorporate small group project time in lesson plans.
 - Administration can set up resource space for teachers to share class material, coping strategies and resources such as [Society for Personality and Social Psychology \(SPSP\)](#). .
 - Teachers can be instructed to “pop in” mental health discussions in the middle of their lessons to engage students when they are less guarded.
 - Playing calming music like jazz and lo-fi during class sessions can reduce anxiety (<https://study.com/blog/should-i-play-music-in-my-classroom.html>)
 5. We recommend that schools set up Peer Support Apps and train peer counselors and everyone to use it.
 6. We hope that schools will consider a monthly Mental Health Rest Day.
 - Once a month, give teens a day off from school work to do something that relaxes them.
 - Schools can suggest ideas and encourage students to reflect on their choice of relaxing activities so that the day off is meaningful.
 7. We recommend the following ways for schools to continue building the sense of community.

- Online events like talent showcases and movie nights via Zoom and Google Meet, would be for everyone's enjoyment and the money earned could be placed in charities to aid the less fortunate.
- Create student accounts on school approved social media so that teens can interact with classmates online within the school community.
- Host regular social hours between students and the administration for Q&A.
- Post weekly news video shows to keep students up to date about what is happening at school.
- Set up Community Time / Homeroom Time and do mindfulness and gratefulness meditation exercises.
- Continue operating clubs and move them online:
 - Approve new club ideas as long as they meet the school guidelines.
 - Create Club Time by using Zoom's breakout room feature so multiple clubs can take place at the same time, and teens can drop in and visit various clubs.
 - Task students to organize activities themselves to promote socialization and communication.

8. We recommend continuing Career Days online.

Teen's anxiety often comes from their uncertainty about the future. Schools can invite parent and alumni volunteers as guest speakers to share their career tips and college tips. .

ON THE GLOBAL LEVEL

1. We propose a Worldwide Mental Health Awareness Campaign backed by WHO under United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal no. 3: Good Health & Well-being.
 - Who: Organized by WHO and sponsored by multinational corporations, athletes and sports leagues, musicians and movie stars, and executed by UN member states..
 - How: Create an inspiring slogan and use it widely as a hashtag, for example, "#Better Minds for a Better World." Close examples of this are BlackLivesMatter and the Me Too movement. Participating member states can regularly run mental health awareness PSAs (public service announcements) during prime time, made available in local languages.

- Where: These messages can be on broadcast media such as TV and Radio; streaming services such as Netflix, Youtube, Disney+/Hotstar; print media such as newspaper, magazines, posters; and of course the internet.
- What: Content can cover the following:
 - Speeches and advice from psychologists or counselors (such as lectures by [Alan Watts](#)).
 - Mental health surveys to collect data for analyses on the worldwide level.
 - Documentaries and true stories for public understanding of mental health issues.
 - Helpful Apps such as Anxiety Coach, Headspace, Breathe2Relax, CPT Coach, Happify, MoodKit and others.
 - Information and examples of how teens can use their time wisely to engage in healthy activities, such as taking the time to organize rooms, taking a walk, trying yoga, reaching out to an old friend, watching a movie that you haven't had the chance to watch, etc.
 - Inspirational, motivational quotes and images.

2. We propose the creation of a worldwide platform with fun challenges for Teens **Note: Buddies*

Without Borders Clubs plan to pilot this idea in 2021. Please check in for updates!

- What: List goal-oriented challenges to divert teen's attention from sadness and loneliness, and replace the often sedentary video games.
- Where: Available on desktops or on handheld devices.
- How: Each student can create an individual account, set up their own challenges, and invite friends to join them to achieve the challenges. Categories can include: learning a new language, learning a new sport, submitting homework on time, etc.
- Sponsorships & Rewards: When a goal is achieved, teens receive points for rewards such as discounts to museums, cinema, theatres or restaurants. This can be win-win for students and for the businesses.

4. We propose a website full of self-help resources supported by a non-profit organization such as World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), and contain the following:

- Symptom Checker: Similar to WebMD, this website features questionnaires which teens can use and identify if they have any mental health issues. If help is required, the website will then refer them to a psychologist and recommend solutions.

- Open Q &A Chat Room: Features a certified psychologist volunteer on duty whom teens can chat with (anonymously or not) about their problems. Certified psychologists can be searchable by country/language.
- Anonymous Buddy Program: Teens who are struggling can be paired anonymously and randomly with another so that they can be buddies and feel safe to discuss issues that they wouldn't normally discuss with others. Teens can apply through school counselors, online or at any medical center. For admission, buddies must attend workshops covering the following skills:
 - Active listening.
 - Do not attempt to give advice or “add to the flame.”
 - Share as much or as little as you want to.
 - Know when to report out for professional help.
- Educational Resources: Features a library of educational videos, blogs, books or other tools on mental health, including resources and workshops for teen’s parents.

5. We propose vocational training for Teens in poor or remote areas through TV and Radio.

- Having skills and outlooks for jobs is vital to teen’s mental health. Without access to quality education due to technology, broadcast media such as TV and Radio can be used for educational purposes.
- What: Features skill training sessions such as sewing, baking, customer service, etc.
- Who: These sessions can be sponsored by industries and businesses that will benefit from having such a workforce. This will help businesses to develop skilled workers before actually hiring them; and will inspire teenagers because they see potential job opportunities.

ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

1. We believe that mental health services should be covered in the national health insurance policies.
2. We recommend making Mental Health Support groups available widely, similar to Alcoholics Anonymous.
3. We recommend a hotline to connect struggling teens with volunteer psychologists. Assign ID to callers and psychologists so that follow-up sessions can be arranged if necessary.
4. We recommend that parents of teenagers attend Mental Health Awareness workshops through their employers.

5. When it is safe to do so, the government can sponsor teen-themed activities in public parks on the weekends, rotating through different parts of the country. Businesses can make money by providing products and services including transportation and equipment. Safety guidelines such as zoning for social distancing, mandatory masks and gloves, pre-entry temperature checking and frequent disinfecting should be implemented. For example:
 - Surfing / Beach Party
 - Drive-in Movies
 - Musical Events
6. For remote areas where technology is not available, we recommend that the government divide the township into smaller sections for in-person schooling, and incorporate counseling into their lesson plans.
7. We recommend that the government and charities establish a Volunteer Counselor Foundation.
 - For schools and rural areas in need, the Foundation can assign counselors for routine visits.
 - The visiting counselor can identify teens who are struggling and recommend doctor visits.
 - The Foundation can also offer free counseling sessions to families that are not insured.
 - The Foundation can offer training sessions to local volunteers and health professionals who will then remain in these schools and communities.
7. We recommend that the government invests in creating a device that combines the functions of 1) contact tracing 2) mental health measuring survey 3) mental health helpline.

ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1. We believe that individuals can initiate the following activities / projects in their own community:
 - Virtual Lounges for “Meet & Greet” Events. For example:
 - Schools in the same districts / systems / faiths
 - Sports clubs in the same leagues
 - Chapters in the same associations
 - Pen Pal Programs:
 - Teens can register on a website and get matched with another student based on similar interests.

- Artificial Intelligence programs can be used to detect any inappropriate content to prevent misuse of this platform.
2. Studies have shown that friendship reduces stress. Here are some fun Apps some of us have used to keep in touch with friends successfully, for example:
- Classup: Share schedules and activities in groups, and encourage friends to try new things.
 - Netflix Party: Watch the same movie at the same time online and use the group chatbox.
 - Sports Training Apps: Try the same sports with friends, such as Daily Yoga, Adidas training by Runtastic, Nike training Club, 30 Day Fitness, etc.
 - Keto Diet App: Support each other to eat healthier.
 - Sleep Cycle: Track sleep cycle to improve sleep habits with friends.
 - Marco Polo: Sends video messages to friends. Unlike Snapchat, the video message threads do not delete and are not time-restricted.
 - Hey Tell: Sends voice messages or use it like a walkie talkie that allows users to instantly talk with friends & family.
 - Cloze: Reminds teens to stay in touch with people.
 - Garden: Reminds teens to reach out to the people on their contact list.
 - LokLok: Sends a doodle straight to someone's lock screen.

Do you have other ideas? Feel free to chime in so we can all get better. Submit your ideas to GlobalEducationDestinations@gmail.com. Be sure to note your name, year and school.