



How to Connect to Your Teen's Experience of Anxiety & Depression





Introduction

Sarah Bell



Useful Resources

- 000 and emergency department of your local hospital
- Local GP
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Parentline NSW 1300 1300 52
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Jericho Road 1800 818 133
- Your church Minister, other workers or church members
- Your child's school
- Friends and Family





The Mental Mess

David Phillips



It was already a challenge.

- Pre-pandemic youth:
Anxiety: 11.6% Depression 12.9%
- Disruption to schooling, and to routine, isolation, family stress, reduced peer interaction, increased screen time, reduced sleep
- Even if you were looking for help, it was harder to access.

- Now: a range of results from studies
Anxiety: 1.8% to 49.5%; Depression 2.2%-63.8%

Video - Sylvia



Video - "Nathan"



Sympathy vs Empathy.

- Sympathy
 - Standing at a distance and telling someone you feel sorry for them
- Empathy
 - Sitting with someone and trying to understand what they're going through

What we are hoping for

- You might be thinking
 - What should I be looking out for?
 - What do I say? What should I not say?
 - When do I intervene?
- We want you to feel more comfortable in seeing what the issues are, what options you have to help the teenagers in your life, and what the Bible says in this space.





Discussion

Sarah Bell



With the people near you:

When it comes to mental health, what is the 'unknown' for you?

What makes you feel most out of your depth?



Adolescent Mental Health

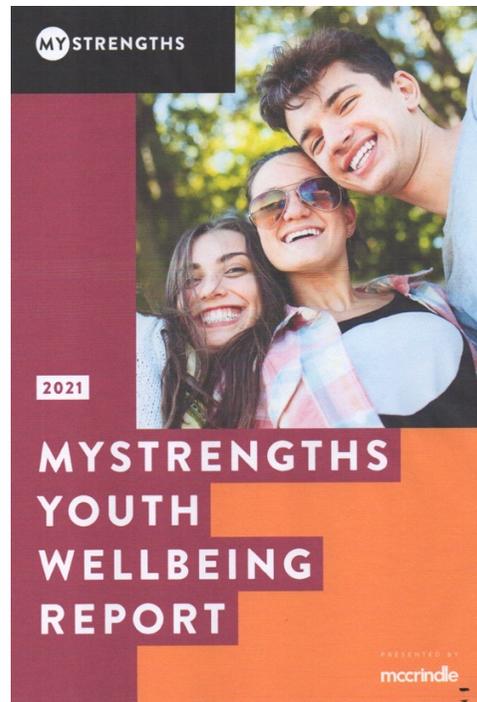
Dr Joanna Barlow
Psychiatrist



1. Normal adolescent development
2. Mental health issues
3. Where to seek help



My Strengths Youth Wellbeing Report Survey of Nearly 10K Adolescents



Normal Adolescent Development

- Bodies changing
- Demand for beauty/good looks
- Brains still developing, being rewired, connections pruned
- Prefrontal cortex (good decision making, impulse control) develops late
- Learning to manage emotions, develop coping skills, problem solving, interpersonal skills
- Need to separate and individuate from parents, develop world views
- Faith - whether to make it their own



New and Added Stressors

- Social media, constant access to the internet
- Friend network online – importance of gaming for many
- Potential for bullying
- Instagram airbrushed images
- Screen time very high for many young people, reduced sleep
- Family breakdown, living between households
- Less compliance to authority, limited discipline options
- Multiple complex career paths possibilities



New and Added Stressors

- The Covid-19 pandemic – health and vaccine uncertainty, changes in school routines, working from home, loss of milestone events
- The threat of war and its current reality: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine
- McCrindle: 41% of young people anxious about the future
- Our teens are probably having a harder time overall than we did, with more uncertainty
- Acknowledging their world is different to ours can be helpful



Mental Health Problems

- McCrindle: 43% of young Aussies aged 15-19 feel stressed all or most of the time
- Related to schoolwork, the future, poor self esteem, difficulties with family and friends
- Mental health problems like ADHD, eating disorders, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia can surface in adolescence
- Anxiety and depression are common and 'normal' – but how to distinguish 'normal' from pathological levels?
- Even if symptoms are mild, good to address them so that coping skills and resilience can develop



Remember

You are not responsible for making a diagnosis

BUT...

Parents know their child best and know what
changes are significant

Symptoms Suggesting Need for Professional Help

- Constant worrying, inability to relax
- School refusal
- Frequent headaches, tummy aches
- Low moods most or all of the time
- Frequent tearfulness
- Irritability/short fuse

- Not enjoying things (sport, music, friends)
- Drop in school performance or motivation
- Avoiding friends, social contacts
- Trouble sleeping
- Losing weight, not wanting to eat
- Or sleeping a lot and gaining weight

Self Harm and Suicidal Thoughts – A Difficult Subject

- The need to self harm is generally different from suicidal thoughts but they can overlap
- Most young people who self-harm are seeking relief from intolerable feelings of psychic pain or numbness rather than wanting to end their lives
- They find cutting, scratching or burning themselves brings a temporary relief from tension
- It's important not to dismiss it as just 'attention seeking' – take it seriously

Suicidal Thoughts

If your child mentions they don't want to be around, or you suspect they may be having such thoughts, ask:

- Have you thought about not being here any more?
- Are you thinking about suicide or ending your life?
- Have you thought about how you would do it?
- Do you know when you would do it?

You may have heard that talking about suicide makes a young person more likely to do it but that is NOT the case.

It can be a relief for them to talk about it.



Resources

- GP
- School counsellors
- Psychologists specializing in young people
- Psychiatrists
- Medication if appropriate
- Trusted people at your church – minister, pastoral care workers, youth pastor
- Parents need support too – important to get permission, maintain confidentiality where possible

Resources

- Kids Helpline – 24/7 free phone counselling service for young people up to the age of 25
 - Offers both crisis and ongoing counselling, connection with a consistent therapist
- Parentline in NSW – free service for parents of kids 0-18, 9am-9pm M-F, 4-9pm weekends – government-run, operated by Catholic Care 1300 1300 52
- Lifeline – helpful facts sheets on depression, self harm etc
- ‘Bite back’ – program for 13-16 year-olds to increase wellbeing and resilience (Black Dog Institute)





Talking with Teens

Tony Ritchie
Psychologist



Common Barriers to Open Communication with Parents

- Believing parents won't understand what they are going through
- Believing parents will make “too big a deal” of things
- Feeling embarrassed or ashamed
- Turning to their friends for support

Creating a Space and Opportunity to have Conversations

- Regular time together that is predictable and allows opportunity for good conversations
- Goal is to create a positive time together where issues can be raised if needed



How to Approach an Important Conversation with your Teenager

- The goal of the conversation is for the young person to feel
 - Heard
 - Understood
 - Cared for
- Adopt a curious approach to the issue with the goal being gaining an understand of their perspective and thoughts on the issue



- Conveying empathy
- Asking if they would like your help or advice at that time or a later time
- Take risk of harm seriously
- Engage other supports when needed or even if unsure

Supporting a Teenager who is Caring for a Friend

- Encourage positive ways of providing support
- Establish boundaries around what support can be provided
- Engage other supports if needed (the friend's parents, school counsellor)
- The young person is not responsible for managing the mental health of their friend

Managing Our Own Mental Health

- Model health approach to mental health by normalizing discussing emotions and seeing health professionals
- Being open about things we do that help manage our mental health
- Being open (age appropriate) about challenges we face



- Being mindful of unhelpful methods of managing mental health
- Work as a family to promote a positive and active approach to managing mental health



The logo for 'Talking Teen' features three stacked speech bubbles. The top one is white with a black outline, the middle one is red with a white play button icon, and the bottom one is black with a white outline.

Talking Teen

Bible Truth for Talking About Depression and Anxiety

Rev Dr John McClean



Proverbs 12:25

Anxiety weighs down the heart
but a kind word cheers it up

Proverbs 16:24

Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones



1. The Lord is near – he holds his people when we can't hold him

John 14:15-18, 27

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. ... he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

2. The Bible voices distress and depression

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.

3. God cares for his people, even our tears

Psalm 56:8

“Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll – are they not in your record?”

4. “Do not worry” is comfort not command

Philippians 4:5-7

“The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

5. Emotions happen to our bodies

Psalm 6:2-3

“Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint,
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.
My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?”

6. You can't solve every problem, and you don't have to

Psalm 131:1

“LORD, my heart is not proud;
my eyes are not haughty.
I do not get involved with things
too great or too difficult for me.”

7. The Lord is in control and is doing good in your life

Romans 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

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Discussion

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With the people near you:

Would you like to take conversations
with your teenager about mental health
in a new direction?

How do you think this might happen?





Q&A Panel

Jo Barlow, Tony Ritchie,
John McClean, David Phillips





Conclusion

Sarah Bell

