



## Heads Up: Teen's Playbook for Positive Mental Health



Being a teenager today can be tough. You're dealing with major life changes like puberty, shifting social circles, increasing academic demands, and evolving family dynamics. On top of all that, you have the added pressure of social media, nonstop comparisons to peers and influencers, and 24/7 access to troubling news and events. It's a lot to handle!

With so much going on, it's no wonder that rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and other mental health issues are on the rise among teens. But dealing with mental health challenges doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. In fact, taking charge of your mental wellbeing during these critical years can help set you up for a lifetime of health and happiness.

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## **Mental Health 101**

First off - what exactly is "mental health?" Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and behave in our day-to-day lives. When our mental health is good, we tend to feel content and engaged. But when it's not so great, we may experience distress that can disrupt our lives.

Mental health is not static - it exists along a spectrum and fluctuates over time based on our circumstances, experiences and habits. It's normal for our mental health to ebb and flow. That said, recurrent struggles that interfere with daily functioning could be a sign of a mental health condition.

If you are struggling or have persistent mental health concerns, know that you are not alone. Many people have faced similar challenges. And there is hope - treatments like therapy, lifestyle changes and sometimes medication can help manage symptoms, so you feel and function better.

That said, professional support is not the only way to care for your mental health. There are lots of habits, strategies and resources you can access on your own to boost your mood and wellbeing. Let's explore some of them now.

## **Shifting Your Mindset**

How we think has a big influence on how we feel. Negative, self-critical thinking patterns can really drag us down. But we have more control over our thoughts than we may realize. Learning to tune into and change unhelpful thinking habits can make a world of difference.

This starts with noticing your self-talk. Your internal monologue - those constant background thoughts and feelings - color how you view yourself, others and the world. Over time, repetitive negative thinking like "I'm not good enough," "Everything is terrible," or "No one wants to be around me" can hurt your self-esteem and outlook.

Remember - thoughts are not facts. Just because you have a negative thought doesn't mean it's true. Pay attention to the kinds of stories you tend to tell yourself. Then, practice reframing harmful thoughts into more balanced, compassionate messages.

For example: "I'm not good enough" could become "I am learning and growing every day." "Everything is terrible" might shift to "Some things are going well, and some are harder right now." And "No one wants to be around me" could transform into "I have people who care about me, even if it doesn't always feel like it."

It takes some effort to make these mental shifts, but the more you do it, the easier it gets. Over time, consciously choosing more positive framing can help you move toward more optimistic perspectives.

Another key mindset strategy is practicing gratitude. Making an effort to appreciate the good things in your life, even small ones, helps rewire your brain for more positivity. Try keeping a gratitude journal where you write down a few things you're thankful for each day.

You can also look for silver linings or try to take a growth-oriented view - asking how a difficult situation could help you build character or expand your skills. While challenges can still be painful, changing how you respond to them can reduce suffering.

## **Self-Compassion & Self-Care**

So much messaging aimed at teens focuses on striving for external measures of success - perfect grades, the "right" achievements and appearance, a million social media followers. But basing our self-worth solely on achievement is not only unrealistic; it can contribute to burnout, shame, and feelings of never being "enough."

What if, instead, you focused more on cultivating self-compassion and nurturing your authentic self? Self-compassion involves treating yourself with care and understanding, especially when you're struggling. It's about holding your imperfections and failures - because we all have them - with kindness rather than harsh judgment.

An important part of self-compassion is normalizing difficult emotions. Give yourself permission to feel negative emotions like sadness, anger, frustration or shame without labeling them as "good" or "bad." All emotions are valid messengers trying to tell us something about our internal experience. Self-compassion allows us to make space for unpleasant emotions with a spirit of acceptance.

As you work on self-compassion, focus on replacing self-criticism with self-kindness. Ask yourself - how could I treat a dear friend feeling this way? Translating that care and comfort to yourself can help ease distress.

Self-compassion and care also mean prioritizing your basic needs. As a teen, taking care of your body with healthy habits like eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep can support emotional equilibrium. Time in nature and getting a healthy dose of joy and laughter into your days can also lift moods.

Be honest with yourself about your limits. Know when to say no and set boundaries around activities and commitments that drain you. While your teenage years are an important time for growth, lasting wellbeing also requires slowing down, unplugging, and making space for rest and reflection.

## **Finding Support**

We all need meaningful social connections to feel well. Even introverted folks benefit from having people they can count on. This support system might include family, friends, peers, mentors, elders, spiritual or community groups, clubs and organizations.

Empathy and listening are at the heart of support. When you're struggling, reaching out to compassionate people who will really hear you and validate your experience can make all the difference.

If you don't have a strong support system, or you need some extra encouragement along the way, there are so many great resources available for teens today. Crisis lines, support groups, peer support programs, school counselors and mental health providers can offer knowledgeable, confidential guidance when you need it most.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Needing support is not a sign of weakness. Many young people face challenges and most adults want to help, even if they don't always show it well. Continue building connections and keep communicating what you need. We're all in this together.

## **Tools for Resilience**

An optimistic mindset, self-compassion and support enable us to face life's inevitable challenges with more steadiness and grace. They help bolster our resilience - the ability to cope with, adapt to and grow from difficult experiences.

While unpleasant events and emotions can still rock our world, these positive habits give us tools to navigate storms and even facilitate personal transformation. With resilience, we're less shaken by adversity and better able to harness its lessons. That doesn't mean we don't ever feel down when we struggle; it just means we're able to bounce back.



So how else can you build resilience? It's good to have a variety of coping strategies on hand for processing stress and strong emotions. Creative expression through art, writing, music or dance can be therapeutic outlets. And learning relaxation practices like deep breathing or mindfulness meditation can interrupt anxious thought patterns.

Problem-solving and goal-setting skills also contribute to resilience. Break down overwhelming issues into smaller, manageable steps. This helps us feel more capable and in control. Envision the life you want to build and connect your daily actions to those dreams.

Above all, know that pain and struggle are part of being human. You cannot always control what happens, but you can control how you respond. Whatever you face, you have the wisdom, courage and capacity to grow from it. Keep approaching challenges with openness, curiosity and compassion.

## **Putting It Into Practice**

When it comes to mental health, all of these strategies work best in synergy. Self-compassion becomes easier with a positive mindset and strong support. Leveraging tools for resilience builds on a foundation of healthy habits and lifestyle factors.

This playbook contains just an overview of the many strategies available to support your mental wellbeing as a teen. If you want to dive deeper into specific techniques and skills you can use on your own, be sure to check out the Take-Home Tools articles linked below.

These self-help guides provide step-by-step instruction and activities to help build helpful habits like mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, emotion regulation and more. You'll find easy-to-follow exercises to strengthen your mental health toolkit, whenever and wherever you need them.

For those looking for targeted advice on common teen issues beyond mental health, the Teen Life Hacks section offers practical wisdom on navigating relationships, school stress, social media and other modern adolescent challenges. Get best practices, tips and tricks for living your best teen life.

With tons of great insight and more coming every month - the Life Hacks section has you covered. It's your all-in-one resource to hack the teen experience.

Remember, you don't have to figure this all out alone. While self-help tools and life hacks are great supplements, professional support is often essential for overcoming serious struggles. Never hesitate to ask for help. You've got this!