

## **Powerful Parenting for August 7, 2024**

We hope you find this information useful, inspiring, challenging, helpful, sobering, insightful, etc. If you want to be added or taken off this list, just let us know. If you know someone who could benefit from it, pass it along. If you have any comments, concerns, want to be added or deleted from this list, email [david@claytonbaptistchurch.com](mailto:david@claytonbaptistchurch.com).

### **Despite Gains, Teens (Especially Girls) Are Still Struggling With Mental Health Issues**

Compared with a decade ago, teens, and especially girls, are more likely to say they feel persistently sad and hopeless and to think about or attempt suicide, according to a new report. Still, recent data suggest things might be improving slightly since the pandemic.

The report, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which has been fielded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more than three decades as a way to measure the well-being of American high school students, found a two-point improvement in the percentage who said they experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness from 2021 to 2023, the most recent years measured by the survey. But overall, the outlook for teens is still pretty dark.

In 2023, 40% of students who answered the survey said they experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. That metric was down from a high of 42% in 2021 but is still about 10 percentage points higher than it was a decade ago. Teens feel less emotional support than their parents think they do, new report shows

In addition, 20% said they seriously considered suicide, up from 17% in 2013. Nine percent said they had attempted suicide; that's down from a high of 10% in 2021, but still higher than the 8% reported in 2013.

The latest round of the survey was completed by more than 20,000 students in grades nine through 12 from a nationally representative sample of 155 schools. "The numbers are telling us that our youth are suffering, and we have a mental health crisis going on," said Dr. Jill Emanuele, vice president, Clinical Training at the Child Mind Institute in New York City. She was not involved in the survey.

When researchers separated the numbers by sex, the picture was very different. More than half of girls (53%) said they felt persistently sad or hopeless compared with 28% of boys. In 2013, those numbers were 39% for girls and 21% for boys. "Girls are definitely struggling more," said Emanuele, who also noted that the differences between sexes may not actually be as wide as they seem. "Girls are more verbal and vocal about some of their challenges, traditionally, boys are not as much, although I think that is changing."

Researchers at the CDC said that while they recognized the severity of the issues, they were hopeful about recent improvements in some of the metrics measured in the survey. "We are not out of the woods by any stretch. We are still, I believe, experiencing a crisis in mental health among young people," said Dr. Kathleen Ethier, director of CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health. "But when we look at the data from 2021 to 2023 we're starting to see these glimmers of hope."

Some of the biggest improvements in persistent feelings of hopelessness over the past two years had been among multiracial, Asian and Hispanic students. And Ethier said she was happy to see that the number of Black students who reported attempting suicide in the past two years had gone down. "In 2021, the percent of students who said they attempted suicide among Black youth was also coinciding with some really disturbing data around mortality to suicide among young people of color, and so we're hopeful that in seeing that fewer Black youth are attempting suicide, that hopefully we'll also see the same similar decreases in mortality," Ethier said.

Even as there were slight improvements, the survey showed some groups are suffering more than others. About half of kids who identify as gay, bisexual, transgender and queer said they experienced poor mental health in the last month, and this group was far more likely to report suicide attempts and experience violence. "We are still seeing really substantial disparities for LGBTQ+ youth in experience of violence and poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and

behaviors that remains a huge concern for us,” Ethier said. Emanuele said the numbers for LGBTQ+ kids were not a surprise, but they were disheartening to see.

“Youth from the LGBTQ+ population absolutely report higher levels of mental health challenges because they are trying to operate in a society that, across the board, doesn’t accept them,” Emanuele said, “So I mean, when you have to deal with it on a regular basis ... that’s a real challenge to your mental health.”

Emanuele said the crisis continues to be exacerbated by a lack of mental health resources and providers for kids and teens, but parents can help. “We all want children to have some kind of mental health literacy, and we don’t want it to all come from TikTok,” she said. Parents should start by educating themselves with trustworthy online resources. Talking to their teens to open a channel of communication is a worthwhile first step, she said. “Being able to say, ‘How are you feeling? What’s going on? And to be able to dialog that together, that’s one of the first things, I think,” she said.

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### **What To Know QAbout Teens, Tanning, and the UV Index**

The term “UV index” is not on the top of our mind for most of us — unless, that is, you’re a tween or teen girl in 2024. On TikTok, nearly a quarter-million posts use the tag #uv. In many cases, these videos refer to the UV index, a shorthand for a measure of how intense ultraviolet radiation is at a given location. In video after video dating back to at least 2022, many with over 100,000 likes, young women in bikinis seek out UV indexes of 6 and above for tanning. The problem is that the UV index wasn’t invented for peak tanning, but rather to tell us when not to go into the sun.

“The fact that they’re looking for the spike is exactly the opposite of what it was originally meant for,” said Morgan Rabach, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “This is dangerous behavior.”

The UV index measures potential UV exposure: A count of 2 or lower is considered “low,” according to the Environmental Protection Agency, while 3 to 5 is “moderate” and some sun-safety precautions are recommended; 6 through 11 and above are considered “high,” “very high” or “extreme.” The EPA says being out in UV 6 or higher requires “protection against sun damage.”

At the end of June, Brooke Jeffy, a dermatologist in Scottsdale, AZ., posted a response on TikTok to a teen tracking the UV index. The comments it received, she said, were filled with “kids popping in and saying, ‘I’ve been doing that.’” “I don’t know who started using this index for evil, but it seems like that’s catching on right now,” Jeffy said. But experts agree: No amount of tanning is safe. And sunburns are never okay.

“Anything over a [UV index of] 3 means to be careful,” Rabach said. “You can target a UV index of 10 or 11 one time, get a blistering sunburn and double your chance of melanoma for the rest of your life.” Higher UV numbers pose “extreme danger,” she says.

The EPA recommends that people start taking precautions, including wearing a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher, once the UV index hits 3. Above 7, the EPA advocates sun-protective clothing and seeking shade. On the beach, conditions are even more intense, as white sand can “double UV exposure,” the agency says.

So how can parents or caregivers speak to teens about this? Experts recommend approaching them with curiosity, asking questions, being active listeners — and, although it’s sometimes difficult, trying not to be judgmental. “You have to really control your emotions because, if you react in a way that makes teens sense judgment, they will think, ‘I can’t talk to them,’” said Harmit Singh, a psychiatrist in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Maintaining a connection and avoiding invalidating teens’ perspectives will get you further in the long run.

“None of us like the finger-wagging, so if we approach teens in a gentler way, we’re often getting the information we’re looking for and are able to provide advice,” said Erin Belfort, a Portland, Maine, psychiatrist who specializes in caring for children and adolescents. Belfort cautioned that it’s not a “one and done conversation” but a “constantly evolving” exchange and said

she likes to ask teens questions such as: “Do you think it’s healthy? Unhealthy?” I’m trying to see if there are cracks because often, they’re questioning these things on some level. If you can find that opening ... you can offer some facts.”

If that doesn’t work, some experts suggest appealing to vanity. “I’m not going to say wrinkles aren’t beautiful,” Rabach said, “but the sun creates visible damage on the skin that’s showing us it’s not healthy for our body.” These short-term effects could make teens think twice, but concentrating on long-term consequences like skin cancer is less likely to be effective. Teens’ brains aren’t developed enough to be swayed by future ramifications.

Jeffy suggests that parents model good behavior for their children, including wearing long sleeves and hats in the sun. And, dispense with the index abbreviation and spell out what UV stands for: ultraviolet radiation. “Let’s make it a little scarier,” Jeffy said. Ultraviolet radiation “doesn’t sound good to anybody.”

In the end, adults should remember that the strongest developmental pull for teens is to fit in and be accepted. That could explain the irony of teens swarming the aisles of Sephora for anti-wrinkle creams and then seeking out sun exposure that will lead to wrinkles. But understanding this developmental need can also help with solutions. Perhaps the craze for skin care can be leveraged to get kids to use sunscreen — and to start that important habit early.

Singh said another vital approach to viral trends is to “encourage individuality.” He tells kids: “Everyone has their own path. You have to find what works for you, rather than completely change yourself.” Rabach agreed: “We really have to love the skin we’re in, whatever shade it might be. That’s what true beauty is.”

Still, the pace and peril of the trends can be overwhelming even to the experts who follow them closely. At the end of Jeffy’s post, she said, her voice weary: “Videos like this just really make me question what I’m doing with my life.” A mother of three young daughters, Rabach remains alarmed. “I feel TikTok needs to shut this down,” she said. TikTok had not replied to a request for comment as of publishing time.

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