

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Supporting Child and Youth Mental Health

Children, by nature, are social beings. Children learn through social relationships, play, and other opportunities to practice and develop their skills and receive feedback.

It's important that as parents, caregivers and educators, we recognize and understand that typical development may have been slowed during the pandemic due to the social distancing, reduced time in classroom and reduced opportunities to learn and practice new skills. In the home or classroom that may look like behavioral outbursts or tantrums, difficulty following direction, or difficulty with peers. These may be distressed behaviors versus misbehavior.

Fortunately, with caring connected support, many of these children can gain those skills and get back on track developmentally. For youth who were already struggling with mental health challenges before the pandemic, the impacts of the pandemic may have exacerbated those concerns. We know treatment is effective and can return prolonged distress to more normal levels of functioning.

As the U.S. Surgeon General noted in his recently released advisory on youth mental health, "Supporting the mental health of children and youth will require a whole-of-society effort". It's all of us, as family members and community members looking at how we create environments of connection and support. We all need to care for our mental health as a component of our overall health. There are actions we can take for ourselves and our loved ones; and there are effective treatments and interventions.

Recommendations From the U.S. Surgeon General's Report

- Recognize, manage, and learn from difficult emotions
- Ask for help
- Find ways to serve and be a source of support for others
- Be intentional about your use of social media, video games, and other technologies
- Review your practices around Sleep, Nutrition, Social connections

Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Childhood and adolescence are periods of tremendous growth and development, including socially. Children and youth learn through social relationships and need to learn skills for navigating the ups and downs of relationships. During the pandemic, and especially when physically distancing from others in order to keep ourselves and others safe, many youth may have turned to virtual methods of connection. (Some reports suggest that around 80% of teens have at least one social media account.) Parents, caregivers, and others may wonder what impact social media may have on children's mental health.

While systematic reviews of the literature suggest there is a relationship between social media use and mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety and psychological distress, it is not clear that the one causes the other, simply that there is a connection. Caregivers and youth can attend to how a time spent on social media and the quality of that use may be impacting other aspects of the youth's life. For example, use of social media may impact sleep, contribute to sedentary behavior, may distort the youth's self-concept and confidence if comparing themselves to others; or contribute to feelings of missing out. But social media also may be a "safe" place for some youth to connect with others, to find social support without stigma; although the quality of that social support may vary.

Some helpful resources for families to learn more about social media use among youth can be found below.

- How can we build a world where we have healthy relationships with technology?
 - ◆ [For Students, Parents, and Educators \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/for-students-parents-and-educators)
 - ◆ [Youth Toolkit \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/youth-toolkit)
 - ◆ [Take Control of Your Social Media Use for Well-being \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/take-control-of-your-social-media-use)
- Podcast on the power technology has over our lives.
 - ◆ [Your Undivided Attention Podcast – Center for Humane Technology](https://www.centerforhumane.com/podcast/your-undivided-attention)
- <https://www.indieflix.com/like/resources> – a list of resources about social media, includes short videos and clips with experts.
- [Social media can hurt. Here are 6 ways to reduce its harms \(fastcompany.com\)](https://www.fastcompany.com/9048886/social-media-can-hurt): tips from a mental health expert.
- [Social Media Effects on Teens | Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem \(childmind.org\)](https://www.childmind.org/article/social-media-effects-on-teens)
- Age-based ratings for entertainment and books worth reading:
 - ◆ [Common Sense Media: Age-Based Media Reviews for Families | Common Sense Media](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/age-based-media-reviews)
- Podcast on social media and teens, from American Psychological Association <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/social-media-teens>

Culture is a Protective Factor

For the Abenaki youth, creating a wampum belt, performing a ceremonial dance, or listening to traditional stories is not just a part of their culture, it is part of their wellness. These activities connect youth to their heritage, community, and ancestors. The feeling of belonging and that they matter can give them the strength to cope in the face of adversity. To learn more, please take a look at the following resources.

The Vermont Indigenous Heritage Center – Culture is Connection

<https://www.alnobaiwi.org/blog/culture-is-connection>

Center for Parent and Teen Communication – Cultural Practices Within Indigenous Communities That Help Teens Thrive

<https://parentandteen.com/cultural-practices-in-indigenous-communities-that-help-teens/>

SAMHSA Native Connections – Culture is Prevention

https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cultureisprevention_final_2019-01-08.pdf



Abenaki Wampum Belt

May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) can occur any time during pregnancy or the first year after childbirth, making it the leading complication of childbearing. Both common and treatable, as many as 1 in 5 pregnant or postpartum Vermonters suffer from symptoms of depression and/or anxiety during the perinatal period. Early national data suggests these rates have increased to at least 1 in 3 since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is evidence that fathers, partners, foster/adoptive parents, and other caregivers are similarly at risk from the stress of welcoming a baby.

It's not just postpartum and it's not just depression; there is a wide spectrum of emotional distress that can present with PMADs.

Symptoms include feeling overwhelmed, irritable, weepy, empty, loss of interest, exhausted but unable to sleep, having scary or unwanted thoughts, and/or just not feeling like yourself. Left untreated, PMADs can have a profound and lasting impact on entire families. Universal screening for PMADs is a critical step in identifying individuals in need of treatment.

In 2018, VT was awarded a 5 year cooperative agreement by HRSA to address perinatal mental health. The Screening, Treatment & Access to Mothers and Perinatal Partners (STAMPP) program was developed to improve the mental health and well-being of pregnant and postpartum people, their children and families,

by developing and sustaining a coordinated system of mental health supports. STAMPP recently launched a new brand and communications campaign, [Support Delivered](https://supportdeliveredvt.com), to raise awareness around the prevalence of PMADs and bridge connections between expecting and new parents and statewide perinatal mental health resources. Support Delivered is an umbrella of supports and services available, encompassing an array of Vermont-based perinatal mental health resources that includes,

- Mental health clinicians with training and/or specialized expertise in perinatal mental health
- Clinical support groups
- Parenting support groups
- Information on perinatal wellness and stress reduction
- Other offerings (both in-person and virtual)

For more info and resources, please visit- supportdeliveredvt.com

