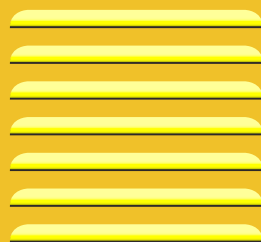




Teens Can be Resilient... in High School!

A Parent's Guide



**For emergency
crisis help:**

- **Call 911**
- **Visit your nearest hospital emergency department**
- **Call a crisis line (page 22)**



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Entering high school can be a challenging time for both teens and parents. The teenage years are a time when many physical, emotional and social changes are occurring. Teens often experience a range of emotions, as do parents.

Teens may not always appear to be listening or willing to change their behaviour based on what you say. It's important to remember that they do hear you, so don't give up. As a parent, or as someone who is important in the life of a teen, your opinion and guidance can be a strong influence. Give your teen extra support when big changes are happening.

Understanding Mental Health and Resiliency

Good mental health is important. It helps us cope with life's stresses and reach our goals. **Mental health is about how we think, feel and act.** When our mental health is good it helps us get the most out of life. We all experience highs and lows in our mental health. When your teen has low periods it doesn't mean they have a mental illness. It's normal to have feelings like anger, sadness or anxiety when facing challenges.

Supporting your teen's mental health helps build their resiliency, which is a key skill to help them adjust to high school. **Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from challenges.** You can play a positive role in helping your teen increase their resiliency. As a parent it can be tempting to solve challenges for your teen. This guide helps you to support your teen to build resiliency and handle challenges with more independence.

You can:

Create a supportive home environment:

- Be physically and mentally available to your teen (e.g., turn off distractions and give your full attention).
- Discuss expectations, rules and consequences with your teen. Set limits, but keep in mind your teen needs independence and wants to feel trusted.
- Encourage a gradual shift in responsibilities from parent to teen (e.g., encourage your teen to set their own alarm to wake up and make their own lunch).
- Set aside time each day to catch up with your teen (e.g., car rides and meals are good times to talk with and listen to your teen).
- Celebrate your teen's uniqueness.
- Learn about resources to support you and your teen with gender identity and sexuality (e.g., PFLAG - Durham, Durham Health Connection Line).

“ Does my teen set their own alarm? ”

“ How often do we sit down together as a family for a meal? ”

“ Does my teen make their own lunch? ”

Talk with your teen during car rides

Turn off distractions

Give your full attention

Have healthy snacks available durham.ca/healthyeating

Build on your teen’s strengths:

- Help your teen identify their strengths and positive qualities. Remind your teen to value who they are (e.g., encourage your teen to take pride in themselves, their family, beliefs, culture, etc.).
- Show interest in the activities your teen enjoys. Encourage them to seek opportunities in high school to pursue their interests.

Celebrate your teen’s successes:

- Let your teen know you see the good things they do by commenting on a specific action (e.g., “I noticed that you unloaded the dishwasher. Thank you”).
- Recognize your teen’s accomplishments – big and small. This helps to build their confidence so they can take on challenges.
- Every teen is different. Challenge your teen to reach their own potential.

Role model healthy behaviours:

- Make time for yourself and do things you enjoy. Looking after yourself will help you become a more resilient parent and better able to respond to your teen’s needs. Find healthy ways to reduce and manage stress (e.g., going for a walk).



“ Do I have interests, passions or hobbies of my own? ”

“ Do I look after my own physical and mental health? ”

Mental Illness

Although related, mental health and mental illness are not the same. A mental illness is when a person is diagnosed with a problem that alters their thinking, mood and/or behaviour. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Symptoms of mental illness often first appear during the teenage years. It’s important to seek help early if you have concerns about your teen’s mental health.

For more information on seeking support refer to the Resources section at the end of this guide (page 22).

Skills for Living

Time Management

High school brings more responsibility so it's important for students to learn time management and organization skills.

You can:

- Show your teen how you manage your own time and share successful strategies (e.g., phone app, computer calendar, agenda, etc.).
- Work with your teen to create a good study space:
 - Inspiring posters/pictures on the wall.
 - A calendar to organize goals and plan for due dates.
 - Desk space that is clean, organized and free of distractions.
 - Strategies to help focus (e.g., soft music, quiet space, stress ball).
- Encourage your teen to meet with a teacher, peer or guidance department for additional support with time management.

Getting Around

Your teen will have to adjust to a new and larger school, get to class on time with the correct materials, and possibly use new transportation.

You can:

- Take time to help your teen get to know the area and the school environment (e.g., ensure your teen participates in high school visits with their class).
- Assist your teen to get the materials needed for classes.
- Plan in advance with your teen how they will get to and from school.

School Work

Your teen will need to adapt to new teaching and evaluation styles, a wide variety of subjects and different teachers and classrooms. They will need to be accountable for their own learning, manage more homework and adapt to a new schedule.

You can:

- Encourage your teen to develop a study plan and review it with them.
- Help your teen take responsibility for managing their school work and schedule.
- Encourage your teen to connect with teachers often and discuss any concerns throughout the school year.
- Work with your teen to identify strengths and assist in setting future learning goals.
- Encourage your teen to problem solve and develop independence.
- Provide opportunities for your teen to make safe mistakes (e.g., give your teen support to attempt new or difficult tasks; model how making mistakes can be a learning opportunity).
- Attend parent information nights and open houses.
- Familiarize yourself with the new school's policies.
- Check the school website often.



Stress

Stress is a part of everyday life and it's normal for your teen to be stressed when they are faced with challenges. In the short-term, stress can be beneficial as it can motivate your teen to work towards goals and problem-solve. You can support your teen with managing stress by helping them identify healthy coping skills.

Exams

Exams can be stressful as they may be new to your teen.

You can encourage your teen to:

- Get a good night sleep with consistent bed and wake-up times:
 - 5-13 year olds need 9-11 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night
 - Teens need 8-10 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night
- Eat healthy following Canada's Food Guide.
- Take breaks while studying (e.g., go outside and be physically active).
- Connect with their teachers ahead of time with questions.
- Utilize teachers, guidance department and peers for support with studying, preparing for and writing exams.

Healthy Coping

Maintaining routines and developing healthy coping skills can help your teen respond better to stress.

“Do we have routines in our home?”

You can:

- Create routines in your home (e.g., meal time, bedtime, homework etc.).
- Role model healthy coping (e.g., be positive, eat healthy, be active and get enough sleep – adults need 7-9 hours).
- Talk to your teen and listen to what they are saying. Don't dismiss your teen's feelings, acknowledge them.
- Help your teen identify sources of stress and together find ways to reduce and/or manage it (e.g., break large tasks into smaller manageable steps, take breaks and try relaxation techniques).



“Is my teen getting enough sleep each night?”

Online Safety

Teens need to learn skills for using the internet and social media safely. Parents don't need to be a technology expert in order to promote healthy use of technology to their teen.

You can:

- Stay informed about how your teen is using the internet and social media.
- Talk with your teen about appropriate internet use that fits with your family values.
- Talk openly with your teen about the risks (e.g., bullying, predators, sharing personal information or pictures of themselves and others, etc.).
- Set limits and technology house rules (e.g., parents know all passwords and have access to all social media accounts, no devices at the dinner table or in bedrooms at night).
- Help your teen manage their use of technology and take breaks from it (e.g., turn off all devices an hour before bedtime).
- Role model responsible technology use.
- Talk with your teen about the long term impact and legal risks of posting content about themselves and others.
- Encourage your teen to “think before posting”.

“ Am I aware of what social media my teen is using?
Do I know how my teen is using social media?
Do we have rules around technology use? ”



Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are very important to your teen and can strongly influence their life. They can be a source of friendship, support, information and advice. These relationships can have a positive or negative impact on your teen. Positive friendships support your teen's well-being at school and throughout life.

“ Do I know who my teen is spending time with? ”

Having supportive friendships helps teens to:

- Adjust to change in positive ways.
- Feel good about themselves and have a positive outlook.
- Feel connected to others.

If friendships are based on harmful interests such as drug use or other risky behaviours, they can have a negative impact on a teen's mental health and school performance.

Teens entering high school will make new friends and may choose to re-invent themselves (e.g., change the way they dress or music they listen to).

You can:

- Get to know your teen's friends and their parents.
- Encourage your teen to develop and maintain positive friendships with peers.
- Talk about possible peer pressure scenarios with your teen and brainstorm solutions together (e.g., peer pressure to skip class or try a drug). Help your teen to learn how to say “no”.
- Maintain open communication with your teen. It's normal for your teen to want to spend less time with you and more time with their friends. It's important that they know you are there to listen when they are ready to talk.



Bullying

A harmful behaviour that a teen may experience in high school is bullying. Bullying can have a negative impact on short and long-term mental health of the victim and the bully. Bullying can take place at school, outside of school, through social media and texting.

You can:

- Talk with your teen about the importance of respecting themselves and others.
- Talk about bullying and online safety with your teen.
- Let your teen know you are available to talk.

If you suspect your teen is being bullied at school, the school will have a process in place to help anonymously report, prevent and/or address bullying. If needed, contact the school's principal, guidance counselor and/or police.



Dating

When students enter high school and meet new friends and social groups, dating relationships may develop. It's important to talk to your teen about healthy dating relationships and the potential risks.

“ Have we talked about this? ”

Healthy dating relationships include:

- Having fun together and listening to each other.
- Trusting each other and being able to work through conflicts together.
- Feeling comfortable with yourself and being able to lead separate fulfilling lives.
- Respecting each other's choices about intimacy and sexuality.
- Being able to say “no” and respecting what no means. Looking out for the safety of yourself and your partner.



Risk Taking and Substance Use

For teens, risk taking is a normal and important part of learning, developing and forming independence. Not all risks are equal. Some teens take part in riskier behaviours such as substance use, risky sexual behaviour or distracted driving (e.g. talking on the phone or texting while driving).

Your teen's brain is continuing to develop until their mid-20s. This can impact their ability to solve problems and make decisions. This can also influence their risk taking behaviour. During high school, teens may be at risk of starting to use substances such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and/or other drugs. Using these substances can have a negative impact on a teen's brain development, mental health and worsen the symptoms of mental health problems. A teen who uses substances is more likely to experience problems at school (e.g., lower grades and social problems) and is at a higher risk of dropping out of school.

When your teen enters high school, they will encounter a change in roles, relationships, experiences and expectations. Some teens use substances due to peer influence and/or to cope with stress (e.g., school demands and conflict with friends or family).



Teens are less likely to take part in risky behaviour when they:

- Take part in clubs and activities in school and the community.
- Have strong connections with their peers, parents, teachers and other trusted adults.
- Have the knowledge to make safe choices. If teens do not understand the consequences of their actions, they are less likely to take the necessary safeguards to prevent negative outcomes.

You can:

- Create a balance between respecting your teen's privacy and knowing what's going on. You may have to start the conversation with your teen.
- Talk to your teen about how using substances can affect their ability to make healthy decisions.
- Teens are watching what you do as a parent and your behaviour affects them. Think about your own opinions and substance use, and what messages you are sending your teen.
- Acknowledge their feelings and point of view without judgement, when they make decisions you don't understand.
- Clearly express your concerns and talk about rules and consequences. If rules are broken, ensure the consequences are fair, consistent, predictable and clear.
- Give your teen a chance to try again after making a mistake.
- Help your teen to identify sources of stress and healthy ways to cope with the stress.
- Encourage and support your teen to volunteer/participate in events and activities at school.

How do I know my teen is having difficulty coping?

If you're concerned about your teen's behaviour or mental health, talk to them and try to find a solution together. Early and ongoing support is key to helping your teen.

Some signs that your teen is having difficulty coping include:

- Declining grades.
- Skipping school and frequent absence from school.
- Frequent problems at school with staff or peers.
- Sudden change in mood, eating patterns and friends.
- Social isolation.
- Sleep problems.
- Self-harm behaviours (e.g., cutting or hurting themselves in other ways).

How do I support my teen if they are having difficulty coping?

- Keep communication open with your teen.
- Talk with your teen about what might be causing their distress.
- Encourage and assist your teen to seek help. Discuss the importance of talking with someone they trust. Your teen may not always choose to talk with you. Help them decide who they would be comfortable talking to (e.g., a school staff member, a trusted adult or peer, Kids Help Phone - an anonymous 24 hour counselling service).
- Explore the **Be Safe app** with your teen. This free, local app gives teens strategies to use when they are having difficulty coping. It also connects them with local resources and supports. You can help your teen make a mental health safety plan with the app. Learn more about the Be Safe app here: <http://mindyourmind.ca/interactives/be-safe>
- Connect with supports available in your teen's school (e.g., school principal, guidance counsellor or social worker) and community.
- Connect with a health care provider (e.g., family doctor, walk-in clinic).
- If your teen talks to you about thoughts of suicide, seek crisis support (see page 22).
- Consider training opportunities in your community to learn more about mental health or suicide prevention (e.g., Mental Health First Aid or SafeTALK training).

KidsHelpPhone.ca
1 800 668 6868

Kids Help Phone


Be Safe

You deserve help.

A mobile app and pocket guide to connect youth with mental health and addiction services.

Make decisions
in crisis.

Find reliable
resources.

Customize
your own
safety plan.

camh mindyourmind
reach out get help give help

Scan the QR or
download the app at
mindyourmind.ca/BeSafe



Resources

Crisis Support Lines:

- **9-1-1**
- **Suicide Prevention: 9-8-8 for crisis support**
- **Durham Mental Health Services**
(905) 666-0831
Crisis Access Linkage Line (C.A.L.L.)
905-666-0483 or
1-800-742-1890
www.dmhs.ca
- **Distress Centre Durham**
(905) 430-2522 or
1-800-452-0688
www.distresscentre.durham.com
- **Kids Help Phone**
1-800-668-6868;
text 686868
www.kidshelpphone.ca

2-1-1:

211 is a helpline that easily connects people to the social services, programs and community supports they need.

OneStopTalk:

A free confidential service that lets kids and youth get immediate mental health support with a registered therapist.
www.onestoptalk.ca

Durham Region Health Department:

Durham Health
Connection Line
(905)-668-2020 or
1-800-841-2729.
(Speak to a Public Health Nurse,
Monday to Friday
from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.)
durham.ca/Mentalhealth

Durham Counselling Walk-in Clinic:

Offers free, confidential, counselling clinic, providing service for children and youth, 3-19 years and their families. Counselling sessions are in-person and virtually. To book an appointment, call the Clinic Coordinator: 289-509-0603 ext. 3203

PFLAG-Durham:

Supports all persons within our reach with their journeys through gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.
(905)-231-0533
1-866-531-2600;
Text 247247
<http://pflagdurhamregion.ca>

SMHO By Your Side:

www.smho-smso.ca

CONNEX Ontario:

1-866-531-2600; text 247247

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) program (if available)





HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

May 2025

Durham Health Connection Line
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729
durham.ca/mentalhealth

Dial 311 (within regional limits)

If you require this information in an accessible
format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

