

Youth Mental Health & COVID-19

Declining mental health has been a struggle for many of us this past year. The effects of the pandemic have been even harder for children and teens, who tend to highly value social interactions and relationships.

Stay engaged by focusing on maintaining relationships with friends and loved ones, even if they're virtual.


- **Connect with friends** through things like online gaming, book clubs, or a designated weekly video chat.



- **Turn on your camera** when you're in online school if you can - seeing your teachers and peers, and having them see you, is an important way to maintain connectedness.



- **Talk to the people you trust** - friends, family members, teachers or counselors - about how you're feeling.

 **Keep up good physical health** - keep up a routine, even if it's a different routine than you would normally have.



- Exercise regularly: studies show that even a small amount of exercise every day can significantly increase mental health. Try a walk, a run, or a hike, or taking a bike ride.

- Eat healthy foods, and try to avoid junk food.
- Get enough sleep and maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- The dark winter weather can add to **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**. Combat this by getting outside every day, even if the weather's bad, and even if it's for a short amount of time. Natural light and fresh air can ward off the effects of SAD.



- Take a vitamin D supplement. Low vitamin D levels may enhance the effects of SAD.

Focus on the things you can control - and help build your resilience by doing so.



- **Recognize what triggers cause you** to start feeling anxious or depressed

- **Have a plan** ready so you can take quick action to counter those triggers.



- **Use the tools** you know work to help calm your anxiety, like:

- meditation,
- taking a walk,
- calling a friend, or
- watching a favorite episode of a show you like.



Trust your instincts if your thoughts or feelings are getting overwhelming.



If you need more help:

- Your school counselor is available to offer mental health assistance, and can help with referrals for mental health services, connecting with teachers, and answering questions about managing stress and school.
- The [Whatcom Care Crisis Line](https://www.whatcom.edu/whatcom-care-crisis-line) at 800-584-3578 can connect you with a licensed mental health professional, 24/7/365.
- [Teen Link](https://www.teenlink.org/) is a helpline staffed by teens, for teens. Call them at 866-TEENLINK (833-6546).
- The Trevor Project offers support for LGBTQ youth. Call them at 1-866-488-7386 to talk to a trained counselor.