Adolescence and COVID-19: How Youth Have Been Affected and How to Help
Gratitude

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe changes and challenges of adolescent development that make social isolation due to COVID-19 especially difficult.

1. Discuss the impact of COVID-19 adolescent physical and mental health.

1. Explain mitigation of negative effects of COVID-19 to promote healthy adolescent development.
Adolescent Development
Adolescent Development

- Transition period between childhood and adulthood; ages 10-21+
- A busy period of development
  - Cognitive development
  - Social and emotional development
  - Forming an identity
  - Physical development, and
  - Sexual development¹, ²

See reviews:
1. McNeely & Blanchard, 2010
2. Meschke, Peter, & Bartholomae, 2012
Brain Changes Drive Development

- The reward center develops before the prefrontal cortex
- Adolescents know behaviors are risky but rewards are great
  - Developmental imperative: first job, first military service, first leaving home would not happen if novelty and risk was not rewarding
- Being with peers is rewarding!
  - Developmental imperative: learning to form and negotiate relationships outside family

1. Arain, et al. 2013
Social Relationships Also Drive Brain Development

- Use it or lose it nature of myelination process (nerve pathways in brain).

- Extended lack of practice with relationships can have long-term effects on emotional development similar to the effects of trauma (e.g., misinterpretation of social cues later in life).
By Age 25: Executive Brain Functions Developed

- Ability to balance short-term rewards with long-term goals
- Considering future and making predictions
- Focusing attention
- Organizing thoughts and problem solving
- Forming strategies and planning
- Inhibiting inappropriate behavior and initiating appropriate behavior
- Simultaneously considering multiple streams of information when faced with complex and challenging information
- Modulation of intense emotions
- Impulse control and delaying gratification
- Shifting/adjusting behavior when situations change
- Foreseeing and weighing possible consequences of behavior
Adolescence - a period of vulnerability

• Mental health
• Substance use
• Peer influences (positive and negative)
• Poor body image and esteem
• Poor nutrition and low physical activity
The Impact of COVID-19
COVID-19 Basics

• A virus (SARS-CoV-2) that spreads through close contact between people
• Symptoms range from mild to severe and usually appear 2-14 days after exposure
• Older adults and people who are pregnant or have underlying medical conditions are at a higher risk for severe illness
• Best protection: Masks, social distancing, hand washing, and getting a vaccine

1. CDC, 2021
COVID-19 in Tennessee

- Among the hardest hit states in the nation
- Case surges in December-January of 2020 and August-September of 2021
- 48.8% of population fully vaccinated (compared to 58.8% nationwide) ¹

¹ Tennessee Department of Health, 2021
Tennessee ranks worst in nation for COVID-19 spread

The report also shows Tennessee has the 10th lowest vaccination rate and the ninth highest hospitalization rate.

Based on population, Tennessee has the most COVID-19 cases in the United States

Adam Friedman  Nashville Tennessean
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Children now make up nearly 40% of Tennessee's new COVID-19 cases, analysis shows
- Tennessee led the nation in COVID-19 related school closures (August-September 2021)\(^1\)

1. Parks et al., 2021
How COVID-19 has Impacted Youth

● Increase in risk factors for poor health outcomes:
  ○ Stress from social isolation, fear of contagion/quarantine, (mis)information overload, loss of routine
  ○ Changes in eating behavior, increased time spent on social media/online, substance use, family conflict, financial hardship\(^1,2\)
  ○ Child abuse/maltreatment concerns\(^3\)

● Decrease in protective factors against poor health outcomes:
  ○ Decreased social interaction/community involvement, restriction of physical activity, worsened academic achievement, decline in healthcare utilization\(^1,2,3\)

1. Cianfarani and Pampanini, 2021
2. Panchal et al., 2021
3. Signh et al., 2021
Vulnerability and Youth

- The pandemic has disproportionately affected people who have underlying health conditions, are low income, or work high-risk jobs.
- Rates of COVID-19 hospitalization among Black and Hispanic or Latino children are approximately 8x and 5x greater than their white counterparts, respectively\(^1\).
- Youth who enter foster care are more likely to have underlying health conditions (80% have at least one medical problem and 60% have developmental delays)\(^2\).
- Prior to the pandemic, LBGTQ+ youth displayed elevated rates of psychological distress and were estimated to be nearly three times more likely to experience suicidality\(^3\).

1. Kim et al., 2020
2. Loria et al., 2020
3. Russell and Fish, 2016
Vulnerability and Families

- Prior to the pandemic, the prevalence of psychological distress among grandparent kinship caregivers was 41%\(^1\)
- Recent data shows one-third or more kinship families live below the federal poverty line\(^2\)
- Childcare is costly and inaccessible for many families
  - School closures have caused parents to miss work in order to oversee children
- Recent research suggests that Hispanic or Latino families’ financial security have been impacted greater than other racial/ethnic groups
  - Recent national survey showed that nearly half of Hispanic or Latino families reported material hardship in the last 30 days\(^3\)

1. Loria et al., 2021
2. Xu et al., 2020
3. Gonzalez et al., 2020
COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES

DISTRESS AND HOPELESSNESS
IRREGULAR FOOD INTAKE
ABUSE AND TRAUMA (DOMESTIC VIOLENCE)
INTERPERSONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESTRAINT
SENSORIAL DEPRIVATION AND NEGLECT

POSSIBLE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

UNDERDEVELOPED BRAIN CIRCUITRY
OBESITY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
LACK OF EMOTIONAL PROCESSING
PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS
SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Figueiredo et al., 2021
Mental Health Outcomes

- The prevalence of clinically significant anxiety and depression symptoms in children and adolescents have doubled during the pandemic (11.6% to 20.5% and 12.9% to 25.2%, respectively)\(^1\)
  - Risk factors include lack of routine, female sex, excessive exposure to media and COVID-19 information, previous referral for psychiatric treatment, high rates of COVID-19 cases in the area, and exposure to a relative with first-line job responsibilities related to COVID-19\(^2\)
- Among children and adolescents with histories of an eating disorder, 41% experienced a reactivation of symptoms after the onset of the pandemic\(^2\)
- Youth with neurodevelopmental disorders, particularly ADHD, showed worsened behavioral problems post-lockdown\(^3\)

1. Racine, 2021
2. Panchal et al., 2021
3. Singh et al., 2021
Physical Health Outcomes

- Declines in vaccinations, screenings, and dental services
  - Up-to-date status on vaccinations declined from approximately two thirds of children (pre-pandemic) less than half (during pandemic)\(^1\)
- Increased risk of obesity in children and adolescents
  - Among persons aged 2–19 years, the rate of body mass index (BMI) increase approximately doubled during the pandemic\(^2\)
- Significant increase in precocious puberty and faster pubertal progression reported in girls since the onset of the pandemic
  - Potential causes include increases in fat mass and psychological stress\(^3\)
- Prevalence of sleep disorders among youth increased from 40% (pre-pandemic) to 62% (during pandemic)\(^4\)

1. Bramer, 2020
2. Lange, 2021
3. Cianfarani and Pampanini, 2021
4. Panchal et al., 2021
Future Effects on Development

- Susceptibility to mental health disorders\(^1,2\)
- Concerns of PTSD symptoms\(^1\)
- Possible resistance of returning to fully in-person activities\(^3\)
- Difficulty establishing strong relationships with mentors and social networks\(^3\)
- “Grief pandemic”

1. Cianfarani and Pampanini, 2021
2. Panchal et al., 2021
3. Singh, et al., 2021
Recommendations
Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)

 Tier 1 - Universal (All students)
• Create trauma-informed settings
• Promote healthy coping strategies
• Support healthy social connections
• Screen for emotional distress

 Tier 2 - Targeted Interventions
• Students identified as at-risk
• Tier 1 support and accommodations
• Further intervention

 Tier 3 - Intensive Interventions
• Exhibiting need for support
• Tier 1 support and wraparound supports
• Licensed service providers

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1. Kearny & Childs, 2020
Creating trauma-informed settings

What does “trauma-informed” mean?

A setting in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, staff, and service providers. Programs and agencies within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies.¹

- NCTSN

The NCTSN offers guides to trauma-informed settings related to COVID-19 (found here) and means to sustain this framework (found here).²

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¹ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Creating, supporting, and sustaining trauma-informed schools,” 2020
Promote healthy coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For caregivers and parents</th>
<th>For youth providers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Routine, routine, routine(^1,2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors, sunlight, and relaxation(^1,4)</td>
<td>Adjustment period(^7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen, understand, respond(^7)</td>
<td>Listen, understand, respond, incorporate input(^7,8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track changes in behaviors(^3)</td>
<td>Adapt classroom approaches and policies(^1,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be aware of your own feelings(^5,6)</td>
<td>Be aware of your own feelings(^8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategies for coping with stress are [here\(^7\)](https://example.com) and [here\(^8\)](https://example.com).

1. Kearny & Childs, 2020
2. Lee, 2020
3. Lorenzo, et al., 2021
4. McCurdy, et al., 2010
5. Pahayahay & Khalili-Mahani, 2020
6. Park, et al., 2020
7. Costa, 2011
Support safe and caring social connections

- Positive social supports are foundational to resilience
- Volunteering and acts of kindness\(^1\)
- Know your community and student populations’ needs\(^2\)
- Maintain transparency and communication\(^2\)
- Continue to talk about and destigmatize mental health\(^3\)

1. Pandey, et al., 2021
2. Hubbard, et al., 2020
Screen for emotional distress

Screenings are universal and an integral part of tier 1 interventions\(^2, 4, 5\)

Screenings may include grief and loss, anxiety, depression, PTSD\(^1, 2\)

Requires the collaboration of school-based mental health professionals and teachers\(^4\)

Destigmatize mental health through self-referral options\(^3\)

A guide for screening is here

1. Guessoum, et al., 2020
2. Kearny & Childs, 2021
4. American Psychological Association, 2020
5. Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018
Help young people access care

• Crisis response, emotional and behavioral interventions, health care

• Universal screening and reduction of barriers\textsuperscript{2,3}

• Youth Mental Health First Aid and \textsuperscript{3}SAMHSA’s Project AWARE\textsuperscript{1}

• Full-service community schools\textsuperscript{4}

2. Hubbard, et al., 2020
Summary

1. Describe the changes and challenges that occur during adolescent development.
2. Summarize the impact of COVID-19 on the future physical and mental health of adolescents.
3. Explain how to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 and promote healthy adolescent development.

What are your takeaways?
The Good News

• Challenges and adversity, when mediated by protectors, can help adolescents develop resilience
  1
• Being at home can afford more opportunities for passions and self-paced learning
  1
• Online communication can help remediate negative feelings after social exclusion
  2


References


Thank You!