

KEY MESSAGES

- Mental Health America (MHA) has developed its 2019 Back to School Toolkit to help increase understanding of stress and loneliness in children and teens and is providing materials on the topic for parents, school personnel, and young people.
- It's important for parents, caregivers, and school personnel to know the signs that a young person is struggling with his or her mental health and be willing to help.
- Stress is more common in teens than many realize, and can impact academics, sports and family life.
- While most kids and teens aren't dealing with bills, difficult bosses, and frustrating commutes, there are plenty of situations that can cause them stress. Things like getting good grades, preparing for the future, loneliness and body appearance all are topics that many cite as causing stress.
- Other factors that may cause stress in teens can be when they have to help care for family members, if they are worried about their physical safety, or if family finances are tight.
- When a teen's stress starts impacting their sleep, when they seem to be getting physically sick more often, when they seem sad and withdrawn – it could be more than typical teen angst.
- Nearly half of Americans also report sometimes or always feeling lonely. Children, adolescents, and teens are no exception.
- It's normal to feel lonely sometimes, but when you are lonely a lot, it can affect you in a number of ways. Research shows that chronic loneliness can translate to poor sleep, high blood pressure, greater risk of suicidal ideation, and even alcohol and drug use.
- If a young person continues to feel overwhelmed, unable to cope and feel as though their stress or loneliness is affecting how they function every day, they may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.
- No one has to suffer in silence. Teens can take the youth screen at www.mhascreening.org to see if they may be at risk. Parents who are concerned can take the parent survey. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with language from the fact sheets and other materials included in this toolkit.