In March 2021, Drs. Alexa Martin-Storey, Université de Sherbrooke, and Melanie Dirks, McGill University, presented a webinar discussing what recent research tells us about adolescent well-being during COVID-19, along with risk and protective factors associated with

1. Following COVID-19 guidelines
2. Mental health and psychosocial functioning, and
3. Maintaining healthy relationships

Click here to view webinar | Click here to view presentation slides

Adolescents and COVID-19 Guideline Adherence

Studies found that the majority of youth reported engaging in more preventative hygiene behaviours after COVID began.

- Higher age was associated with more guideline compliance behaviours

How to Support Engagement in COVID-19 Guidelines

1. In general, providing accurate information about the efficacy and benefits of following guidelines may be important for adolescents.
2. Conduct problems are associated with being less likely to follow COVID-19 guidelines. For adolescents with conduct issues who are less receptive to punishment or prosocial motivation:
   - Use “Let’s Get Smart” and other intervention approaches that increase motivation among children with conduct problems to perceive the thoughts and feelings of others.
3. Contextualizing information and providing specific examples of how adolescents' actions could lead to harm in others may lead to better outcomes.

How is COVID-19 Impacting Adolescents?

COVID-19 Related Possible Difficulties for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Youth

1. Fewer resources for social distancing
2. Difficulties with at-home learning and accessibility
3. Being employed or having family members employed in higher contact jobs (more stress regarding COVID-19 exposure)
4. Less or no contact with school-based support and/or resources
COVID-19 Related Possible Difficulties for Racialized Youth

1. Negative (and disproportionate compared to white youth) impact of increased police surveillance of adolescent behaviour, especially for Black youth
2. Youths’ role as language/cultural translators for family members with language barriers
3. Pre-existing stressors impacting current medical vulnerability for adolescents and their families
4. Exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities in terms of resource availability
5. Difficulty in engaging in online learning among rural youth and particularly rural youth in Indigenous communities

COVID-19 Related Possible Difficulties for Gender and Sexual Minority Youth

1. Exacerbation of pre-existing issues around housing security
2. Fewer opportunities to connect with their chosen family/community
3. Barriers to accessing mental health services
4. Less access to identity-affirming medical services
5. Feeling stuck with unsupportive family members

COVID-19 Changes in Mental Health

Different kinds of information suggest changes in mental health for adolescents pre and post COVID-19 measures.

1. Help lines: In Canada, increase from 1.9 million calls to Kids Help Phone in 2019 to 4 million in 2020
2. Youth perceived change in mental health since COVID-19 began:
   • Worse mental health
   • Less substance use

COVID-19 Related Changes for Adolescents

• Normatively, adolescence is a time where we see youth spending increased time with peers, and increasingly less time spent with family. This is expected as teens become autonomous young adults.
• The pandemic is fundamentally changing the groups of people with whom adolescents are spending their time.
  1. In a nationally representative sample, the percentage of youth who spent 0 time with their best friend has increased since the pandemic began.
  2. The percentage of youth who spent 3+ hours a day with their parents and siblings increased, and percentage of youth who spent 3+ hours a day with best friends decreased since the pandemic began.

• COVID-19 has led to some major changes in the lives of adolescents:
  1. Less mobility compared to prior to COVID-19
  2. More perceived screen time
  3. Reduction in time spent in active play
     • One study found that less than 1% of youth were meeting physical activity guidelines.
Recommendations for Parents and Educators

1. Support healthy relationships at home
   - Youth are spending increased time with parents and siblings, and potentially not by choice.
   - This increased time with family presents both risks and opportunities:
     - May present risks for those that have highly negative relationships with their families – fewer or no chances to leave, to take a break, or to get support from someone else.
     - May also be an opportunity to build stronger and more affectively positive and warmer relationships with between siblings and children/parents.
   - Pay attention to sibling relationships. Research shows that sibling aggression can have significant long-lasting consequences on adolescents’ mental health, especially during COVID-19.
     - When aggression between siblings is growing, do your best to intervene.

2. Perceived instability of relationships may be a risk marker
   - Youth reporting highest levels of depression symptoms and marijuana use see their relationships as getting better and getting worse
   - Youth reporting positive changes in relationships also reporting higher levels of internalizing symptoms
   - Takeaway: Even if things seem positive, you may want to dig deeper: there may be other areas where things are getting worse for youth.

3. Reach youth through multiple modalities
   - Use varied and individualized approaches in encouraging guideline adherence.
   - Text-based support may be important for youth who are worried about being overheard/have little privacy.