



ENYA 2018: Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk about MENTAL HEALTH »

Young People's recommendations:



Mental health defined by the young people

Mental health is a psychological state that affects your life in good or bad ways. Mental health can be positively affected by going to parks and surrounding yourself with nature, by feeling confident, by receiving the support of family and friends, by meeting groups and by working hard (to reach your potential).

On the opposite, your mental health can be negatively affected by stress (due for instance to financial issues, exams, relationships, addictions or otherwise).

If you are mentally healthy: you can feel comfortable in yourself and have good self-esteem, you feel you can trust yourself, you feel strong and you know you can overcome challenges.

Despite the stigma that surrounds it, mental health is as important as physical health.

Recommendations of the young people

Education

- Teachers should be trained to improve prevention and detect child and adolescent mental health issues in a timely manner, especially regarding those that require immediate attention. Training should also be given to children regarding acceptance and diversity.
- Schools should have specialized staff. A school psychologist and social worker should be available in all schools in order to provide support and information regarding existing services.
- Young people should be made aware of their mental health rights.
- Coordination between the school and the centers of mental health should be improved in order to respond to the mental health needs of children and adolescents.
- Prevention measures regarding the consumption of toxic substances and support for families should be increased.
- There should be more talks about Mental Health in schools, which would include interventions from professionals, testimonies and experiences of people affected by mental health issues, in order to break the stigma, to eliminate labels and to prevent discrimination. Such talks should start in primary schools.
- Mental Health should be included in the syllabus of Personal and Social Development classes.
- Childhood experiences directly affect mental health. Although some aspects of a discussion on mental health may be too sensitive for young children, sessions could be held to teach them positive ways of expressing their emotions and how to deal with negative emotions.
- 'Spaces' should be created within schools where children feel comfortable to open up and ask for support with no fear of judgement. There should also be allocated 'spaces' for young people to have some alone time should they require it.
- Students should have more opportunities to be listened to.
- Changes must be applied to the educational system in order to give equal importance to the emotional development of children and not to only focus on academic success. The system should also allow children to have more leisure time.
- Stress in education should be reduced by giving less homework and by putting less pressure on students regarding exams.

Health

- There is a need for awareness-raising campaigns in order to reduce stigma. This will encourage young people to ask for help. The visit of a child to a psychologist should not be considered a taboo.
- Awareness-raising should include active participation of young people, in a "peer-to-peer" way, in

order to deliver the message to other youngsters, thus making communication more effective.

- Focus should be on what good mental health looks like in order to generate a positive message. Awareness-raising should include explanations on the importance of environmental factors on mental health and could highlight practical solutions such as healthy eating, regular exercise, having a support network of trusted people etc...
- Children should be able to ask for professional help without the consent of their parents. The age of medical consent should at least be lowered to the age of 16.
- More resources are needed in the health sector to reduce waiting lists in child mental health centers/services and to give immediate attention to children and adolescents who require it.
- Mental health services for children should be provided by specialized personnel who are trained on children's issues.
- Children and young people should have access to community-based services as much as possible.
- Accident and Emergency Departments providing help for children and young people in crisis should be improved. Waiting times are too long and paper-thin cubicles are not appropriate for young people.
- The health sector and the educational sector should be more coordinated, in order to improve prevention and detection of child and adolescent mental health issues, especially for those who require immediate attention.
- There should be more communication and collaboration amongst different healthcare bodies when providing mental health services. Such issues are often linked to social/physical issues; therefore, there is a need for a holistic approach.
- There is a need for more investment in young people's mental health.
- Information about help centers should be disseminated and services should be made more accessible to children and adolescents.
- A child-focused helpline that would provide guidance and support to children regarding mental health issues should be set up. This should be available 24/7.
- Approaches that are not only based on medicating children and adolescents, but which also focus on offering support to children and their families should be explored. Such support would promote positive family relationships, solve conflicts, instill trust and reduce aggressiveness. Guidelines on how to improve the quality of life of the child should also be established.
- Prevention toward the consumption of toxic substances and its consequences should be increased from early stages.
- More research should be made in the area of mental health.
- National Standards regarding Mental Health should be established.

Media

- The public should be made more aware of the proximity and breadth of "Mental Health"! Its scope should be explained from an integrative perspective.
- Public awareness should be increased through TV programs and messages to promote diversity and inclusion.
- Advertisements should incorporate different profiles of children and adolescents in an inclusive way.
- Media should be informed on how to work on this issue to protect people with mental health problems from stigma.
- The broadcasting of such messages has to be accessible to young people, for example through the platforms they use every day like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TV channels.
- Famous people that young people follow, like singers or actors, can promote the messages in order to reduce stigma.

- Websites and other information portals offering support to young people should be promoted.

Government

- Parents and educators should be educated on issues related to children's rights and the development of children in a healthy environment.
- Workshops for children and parents on promoting healthy relationships should be organized. Sessions should be held both together and separately. Such workshops should be fun so that young people will continue to attend.
- There should be mandatory courses for parents, to be held at the place of work. This course will help the parent learn how to recognize signs of distress in their children.
- The State must provide financial assistance to families in need. In cases where financial support is needed, this should be done in a discrete way.
- There is a need in investing in financial support for families, to encourage children to continue studying after compulsory school age and not to drop out of school to work and support their families.
- The State must provide services for children with disabilities or children who face health issues in order for them to be able to ask for support once they need it.
- Appropriate infrastructure should be created, such as ramps so that children with disabilities can fully participate in all activities. This will have a positive impact on their mental health.
- Laws and measures should be in place to ensure that there is no discrimination toward people suffering from mental health disorders.

Community

- Support groups should be created within the community.
- Spaces within the community where children can participate in various activities along with experts should be created.
- Spaces within the community where children and adults can discuss issues that affect them should be created.
- Opportunities for free participation of children in sports and cultural activities during their leisure time should be provided.

