



From TDSB Psychological Services  
to Your Family



**Psychology Month** is celebrated every February by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), to highlight the contributions of psychological service providers, and to show how psychology works to help people live healthy and happy lives.

**The field of psychology in Canada is vast and constantly growing with new research, innovation, and funding.** If you have a child in secondary school who is interested in a career in psychology, check out CPA resources for education and career planning ideas!

Curious what School Psychology staff do? Check out the CPA's 2-minute YouTube video to learn more!



In this issue of **Hearts & Minds**, we aim to **provide useful information about child development and emotions, including the presence of mood disorders in students.**

TDSB Psychological Services staff are trained to help support students with a wide variety of emotional and mood related challenges. If you have concerns about your child, reach out to your principal or teacher. They can help you get in touch with the professional support service providers at your school.

# How Can We Help Kids Tolerate Distress?

By Adele Goldberg Ph.D., C.Psych.

All feelings are normal and important - even uncomfortable feelings, like worry, anger and sadness. Feelings serve a purpose and are part of the way that people are wired. For example, fear and worry can keep us safe. Sadness reminds us that we have made connections with others, and have passions.

As caregivers, we may feel the need to jump in and solve our children's anger and worry, or to reassure them when they are feeling sad or scared. After all, it can be difficult to watch our kids experience big, uncomfortable emotions! However, while this might be helpful in the short term, it could lead to long term difficulties for our children. For example, it may impact their ability to navigate stressful or hard events (by avoiding them altogether or by acting out), or it could lead to unhealthy coping patterns (like withdrawal from family and friends, or using drugs or alcohol to cope).

It is important for children and teenagers to learn to accept uncomfortable feelings, or "tolerate distress", by using healthy ways to cope. When focusing on distress tolerance, the key is thinking about moderation, or finding somewhere in the middle. Learning to bring uncomfortable feelings to a manageable level gives children confidence and life-long skills, so that they can handle whatever comes their way!

By building healthy ways to tolerate distress, children and adolescents can:

- ✓ **Learn that they can face challenging or stressful events** (not avoid them)
- ✓ **Learn to trust their instincts** (not always rely on others for reassurance)
- ✓ **Learn to experience and manage emotions in a healthy way** (not use unhealthy strategies)

## TIPS TO BUILD SKILLS FOR HANDLING UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS:

### TEACH & MODEL

Teach your child to identify their emotions. Tell them when you are having big feelings, by using emotion words and labelling how it feels in your body. *"I am feeling mad because I can't find my car keys! It really makes my hands clench and my head hurt when I'm feeling this way."*

### VALIDATE

Validate your child's emotions by listening and labelling. Instead of saying, *"I know you're sad BUT it will be fine"*, consider saying - *"I know you're sad BECAUSE your grandma is sick. Feeling sad means that you really love her. What can we do to show her love right now?"*

### SUPPORT

Support your child in bringing feelings (distress) to a manageable place (in the middle). Evidence-based tools like belly breathing, mindful practices, or physical exercise are just some of the methods you can practice with your child. Make sure to practice regularly!

### ENCOURAGE

Encourage your child to face problems by breaking them down into smaller, easier steps (instead of avoiding them). Keep in mind, this can be hard to do. If possible, wait until your child is feeling calmer and ready to tackle the problem.

### REFLECT

Regularly discuss with your child that, while feelings are important, they aren't permanent. Feelings come and go. Reflect on past moments that were hard for them at first, and then got easier. Model positive self-talk.

### SEEK HELP

Seek help from a professional if your child's difficulties or big feelings go on for a long time, get more intense, and/or get in the way of daily living.



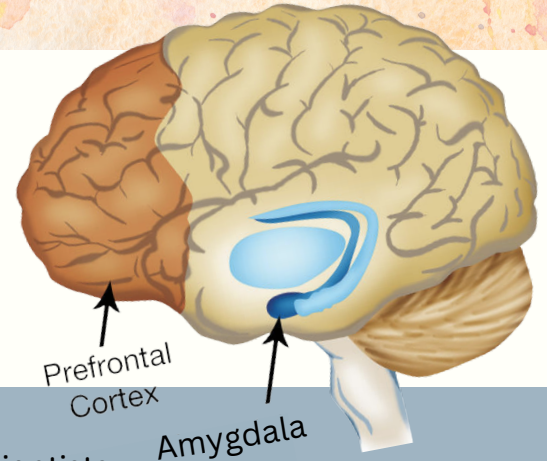
# The Teenage Brain

## Understanding the link between brain development & mental health

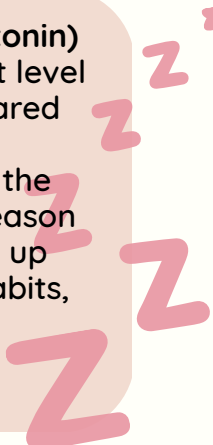
by Dr. Jill Shuster, C.Psych.

Adolescence is a time of transformation. Teenagers are spending more time with friends, going through physical changes, and learning about who they are. There are also many changes happening in a teenagers' brain and hormones. Learning about these developments can help us better understand the behaviour, mental health, and decision making of the teenagers we care for.

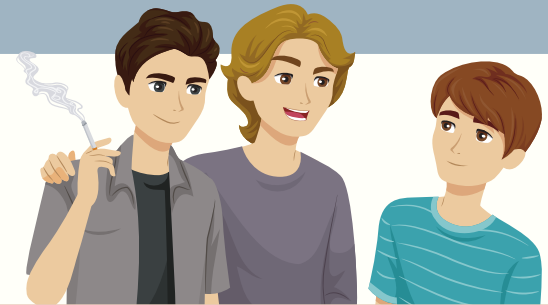
Scientific research has shown that the adolescent brain is unique to this developmental period of life, and the brain continues to grow and develop until well into your 20's. Teenage brains are NOT just adult brains with less experience. After all, growing up and maturing is not just biological - it is psychological as well!



The 'sleep hormone' (melatonin) in teenagers is at its highest level very late at night, as compared to children and adults who produce more melatonin in the early evening. This is one reason why teenagers tend to stay up late and have poor sleep habits, even though their rapidly developing brains need the most sleep!



One important discovery by neuroscientists is that the brain is only about 80% developed in teens. The amygdala, which processes emotions, rapidly develops in an adolescent brain. However, the pre-frontal cortex, which is responsible for decision making and self-control, is the last part of the brain to fully develop (not until adulthood). This makes it more difficult for teens to regulate emotions and follow instructions. The imbalance between these two brain regions also makes teenagers more vulnerable to peer pressure, risk-taking behaviours, and stress.



### As a caring adult, you can support the teenage brain!

Keep the lines of communication open. Listen carefully and offer support and advice without judgement.



Help teenagers discover what they enjoy and what they are good at. Give them opportunities to explore their interests.



Model healthy ways of managing stress. Stay involved in their lives & show genuine interest in their social & school life.



Provide consistent and realistic expectations for sleep, diet, screen time & leisure time. Consistency creates life-long habits!



Prior to adolescence, the body begins to produce hormones that guide emotional and physical changes in puberty. Fluctuations in hormones and brain based changes, combined with the unique stressors of adolescence make teenagers at risk for developing mood disorders like anxiety and depression.



# Noticing & Responding To Mental Health Issues In Your Child or Teen

by Dr. Shelley Moretti, C.Psych.

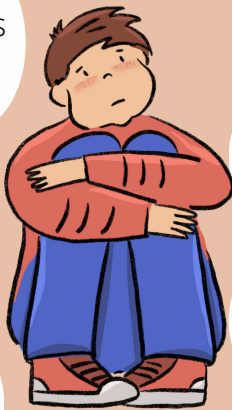


It can be relatively easy to recognize when a child or adolescent has a physical issue, like a cold or a rash. Noticing a mental health issue can be more difficult, but it is important to know what to look for, because identifying mental health concerns early on can be helpful for both short and long-term well-being. Also, research on youth mental health has shown that when kids have open communication with a caring adult (such as a parent), it can improve their overall mental health and willingness to access support. As a parent or guardian, you know your child best, and you are in a good position to notice changes and respond to them.

Here are some questions to consider when monitoring your child for mental health concerns:

- 1 Have you noticed **one or more changes in behaviour** (see lists below)?
- 2 Have these behaviour changes been **present for two or more weeks** in a row?
- 3 Are these changes **causing more distress than normal** at home and/or school?

## Children



Low energy  
Sleep issues  
Changes in appetite

Increased need for contact and reassurance

Frequent temper tantrums

Difficulty concentrating

Low motivation or interest in school work, or refusing to attend school

Withdrawal from friends or family

Ongoing sadness or lack of interest in things they normally enjoy

Physical complaints (e.g., stomach aches, pains)

Low frustration tolerance, irritability

## Adolescents



School refusal

Frequent outbursts of anger/distress

Feelings of anxiety/panic, excessive worries

Physical complaints

Withdrawal from friends or family

Frequent irritability, defiance, opposition

Ongoing negative remarks about self

Difficulty concentrating

Declining grades, low motivation,

Substance use

## Tips for Responding to your Child or Adolescent's Mental Health Concerns:



Try to find a **quiet time** to begin the conversation. Reassure them that they can tell you anything and that you can handle it.

Give them time to reflect before answering. **Stay calm and don't give up!** If it's easier for them, provide options to respond through writing, drawing, or using yes/no questions. If they are not willing to talk, reassure them you can talk again when they are ready.

If they do share some concerns, tell them that you are glad they shared with you, and that you can **work together to find them the right help.**

Start the conversation by indicating the changes you have seen. **Stick with facts.** Share that you wonder how they might be feeling or thinking, or if they also notice the same changes.

If they tell you anything that makes you worry about their **immediate safety**, call 911.





# Book List on Mood Disorders & Big Feelings

Brought to you by:



tdsb  
virtual  
library

TDSB families can access these resources (and many more!) through the [TDSB Library Catalogue](#) or the [Toronto Public Library](#).

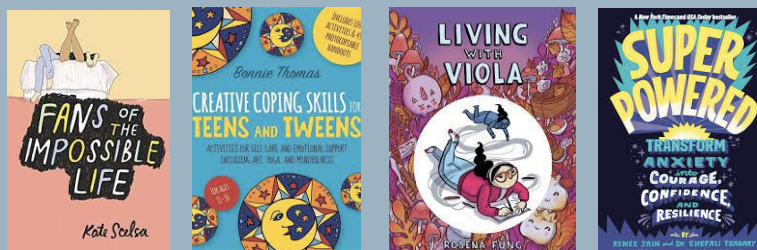
The TDSB Virtual Library is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is also available through Brightspace or your schools website.

Click on book images below for a full description and availability.

## FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



## FOR MIDDLE & SECONDARY SCHOOL



## FOR CAREGIVERS & FAMILIES



# Looking for More Resources?

**Help Ahead** is a centralized phone line to access child, youth and family mental health resources in Toronto.



[Helping children face their fears](#) - Article from Anxiety Canada Foundation



[Dealing with big feelings in 3 steps](#) - Infographic from TDSB Psychological Services



[Tips for emotion coaching for caregivers](#) - Article from Dr. LaFrance (Mental Health Foundations Canada)



[Brainstorm](#) by Dan Siegel



[How To Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk](#) by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish



[The Emotional Lives of Teenagers](#) by Lisa Damour (published this month!)



[Your Teen with Susan Borison and Stephanie Silverman](#) Podcast



[Ask Lisa: The Psychology of Parenting with Dr. Lisa Damour](#) Podcast



[The Coping Toolbox, A Child Psychology Podcast](#)



[The Mysterious Workings of the Adolescent Brain](#) by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore (TedTalk)



[Teen Brains Are Not Broken](#) by Roselinde Kaiser (TedTalk)



[The Adolescent Brain](#) by Dan Siegal (animated video)

# TDSB COMMUNITY CORNER

## Let's Connect

ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**Feel Good February**

**Wednesday February 22, 2023**

**7:00-8:30 pm**



**All caregivers are welcome to join this virtual conference with guest speaker Dr. Amy Gajaria (Psychiatrist)**



**Parents/Caregivers of Students with Special/Complex Needs:  
Virtual Drop-in Hours**

**Join our Virtual Drop-ins**

Wednesdays 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.

[www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport)

Connect with our Professional Support Services staff to talk about taking care of yourself as a caregiver and other ideas related to your child's mental health and well-being



**Virtual Drop-in hours**

**Join our Virtual Drop-ins**

Wednesdays\* | 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.

[www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualsupport)

\*check the website for specific dates offered

Connect with Professional Support Services staff to explore ideas related to your child's mental health and well-being



## In honour of African Heritage Month, TDSB presents **Black Mental Health Talk Series**

with Imani Hennie, MSW (TDSB Mental Health Lead)

**Wednesdays 7:00-8:00 pm via Zoom**



**TDSB Winter Well-Being Guide 2022-23**

available in 21 languages!



**TDSB Psychological Services Google Site**



**TDSB Celebrates**



**Mental Health & Well-Being Resources for all Grades**

