

Management of Youth and Young Adult Mood Disorders (Anxiety and Depression) During COVID-19

Youth's self-rating of mental health has dropped by approximately 20% during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ This resource will guide primary care providers on how to adapt usual practices for managing youth and young adults with anxiety and depression during the pandemic. Since the care of these patients has not changed significantly, this tool is intended to supplement the [CEP's Youth Mental Health Tool \(2017\)](#).²

In case of an emergency



- Ensure that you know the patient's location in case you need to call your local emergency number.
- Encourage your patients to contact their [local crisis line](#) for emotional support, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention.³
- To complete Form 1 via telephone or video, consult [COVID-19 and the Mental Health Act](#).⁴



How to conduct virtual visits and when to see patients in-person

Patient preferences and privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your patient which virtual modalities they prefer using. See the CEP's resource: Enhancing Management of Chronic Conditions Using Virtual Care During COVID-19.^{5,6} • Confirm access to private space and ensure that the only people present are those that your patient wishes to be.^{5,7} • Inquire if your patient would prefer having a family member or trusted individual present • Determining if a youth is a mature minor can be done virtually using routine practices.²
Strengthen the patient-provider relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that meeting over video/phone can feel awkward/uncomfortable.⁶ • Leave a pause after your patient answers questions, so you do not disrupt their thinking.⁶ • See additional Tips for practicing patient-centred virtual care.⁵
Patients to see in-person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New patients or patients who you have not seen in person for an extended time. • Patients who have privacy and confidentiality concerns at home. • Patients who present with concerning sudden weight loss, psychosis, or other medical conditions. • Patients who are more complex.



Tips for Providing Care During COVID-19

	Provider information and resources	Patient resources
Screening, diagnosis and prescribing therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue screening, diagnosing, and prescribing therapy as per usual practice (see CEP's resource: Youth Mental Health).² • Consider sending screeners (e.g., PHQ-9, AUDIT-10, GAD7) in advance when possible. See the Virtual care during COVID-19 resource.⁵ • Consider directing patients to online counseling services (e.g., CBT) or referring to Bounceback.⁸ • Timing of follow-ups should follow usual practice and can be conducted virtually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MindBeacon⁹ (online CBT) • AbilitiCBT¹⁰ (online CBT age 16+) • E-Couch¹¹ (online CBT) • Medication and YOUth¹² (SSRI info for youth)
Lifestyle education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathize about deviating from routine during the pandemic, and remind patients that getting back to basics is important for mental health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Proper sleep is 8-10 hrs for <18 or 7+ hrs for ≥ 18 ◦ Patients can learn to cook healthy meals as a fun activity ◦ Exercise can be indoors, or outdoors if following public health guidance¹³ ◦ Socializing can occur via video chatting, online games, phone, or text¹⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with stress and anxiety¹⁵ • ParticipACTION workouts¹⁶ • Headspace¹⁷ (Meditation app - fees may be charged to unlock all features) • Calm¹⁸ (Meditation app - fees may be charged to unlock all features)
Harm reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socializing virtually is possible for many, and the safest approach. If patients feel the need to socialize in person, encourage them to follow public health guidance. • Consider providing tips for harm reduction.¹⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Harm Reduction Tips¹⁹
Trauma-informed care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide trauma-informed care, as the pandemic may be associated with new or exacerbated grief, loss, and trauma.²⁰ • See Trauma-informed Practices for Children and Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic.²⁰ Refer to p.12 for a list of common responses to trauma.²⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of trauma programs²¹ • Psychology Today: locate trauma and PTSD therapists in Ontario²²



HEEADSSSS During COVID-19^{23,24,25}

The HEEADSSSS framework helps to inform the screening process and documentation of patient history.

	Considerations and probing questions	Provider resources	Patient resources
H - Home	<p>School closures and increased distress among caregivers have increased the risks of child abuse and domestic violence.²⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have your relationships at home (e.g., caregiving), or who you live with changed during the pandemic?” • “Are you worried about getting COVID-19 at school/work/ outside and bringing it home?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy considerations for delivering e-mental health services²⁷ • Child Abuse and Neglect in the COVID-19 Era²⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Violence Services²⁹ • Family, Marriage and Couple Therapists³⁰
E - Education/ Employment	<p>Youth and other vulnerable populations have been bearing the brunt of job losses, with youth unemployment at 22%.³¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Are you working, and has your employment changed during the pandemic?” <p>Remote learning may exacerbate the symptoms of ADHD and social anxiety for youth who have returned/are returning to in-person classes.³²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have your plans for school (e.g., university) changed during the pandemic?” • “Have you been working/learning in person, or virtually? How has that been going?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to adult care for youth with special health care needs³³ • Transitioning into post-secondary education: A resource for front-line staff supporting students³⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What financial support is there for young people during COVID-19?³⁵ • Government of Canada: Canada Student Loans – COVID-19³⁶ • Please check if you are eligible through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to be referred to a mental health professional
E - Eating	<p>The pandemic has negatively impacted individuals with eating disorders, and in some studies, almost half of respondents reported a change in eating habits.³⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have your eating habits changed during the pandemic?” • “Has your weight changed during the pandemic?” • “Do you or your parents ever worry about running out of food?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating Disorders Screening Tool³⁸ • COVID-19 Pandemic & Eating Disorders in Children, Adolescents, & Emerging Adults³⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating Disorders including Anorexia and Bulimia Resources⁴⁰ • COVID-19 + ED: FAQs⁴¹
A - Activities	<p>Less than 5% of youth met recommended physical activity guidelines during the first month of the pandemic in Canada.⁴² Many youths and young adults feel fatigued from virtual meetings/hangouts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What have you been doing for fun during the pandemic?” • “Have you found it difficult to socialize or exercise during the pandemic?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 and Physical Activity and Sport Participation for School-Aged Children and Youth⁴² • Zoom Fatigue⁴³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-care during COVID-19⁴⁴
D - Drugs/ Drinking	<p>Alcohol and cannabis use in youth has increased during the pandemic, with 21% of Canadians aged 18-34 reporting increased drinking.⁴⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do you drink alcohol or use tobacco, electronic cigarettes, cannabis, or any other drugs? Is your use the same as it was before the pandemic?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief Screening Tools for Adolescent Substance Use⁴⁶ • AUDIT-10 Interview Version (p. 2)⁴⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance Use and COVID-19⁴⁵ • Canadian Guidelines for Lower-Risk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Alcohol Drinking⁴⁸ ◦ Cannabis Use⁴⁹
S - Sexuality and Gender	<p>During the pandemic, risky sexual behaviours (e.g., sexting) may increase among youth.⁵⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you had any physical or online sexual relationships during the pandemic?” • “Have the types of sexual relationships you have changed significantly during the pandemic?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ - Resources for health care providers⁵¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEP: Local Services Resource⁵² • Sex & COVID-19⁵⁰ • COVID-19 and Sex⁵³
S - Suicide/ Self-harm	<p>Kids Help Phone has seen an increase in volume to their phone line of 170% and an increase of 114% to their text line.⁵⁴ Marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ and indigenous youths) are particularly at risk.^{55,56}</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do you feel more stressed or anxious than usual?” • “Have you thought about hurting yourself or someone else?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Suicidal Clients During the COVID-19 Pandemic⁵⁷ • COVID-19 - Youth Suicide Risk Screening Pathway⁵⁸ • Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) - Brief Validated Tool⁵⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fillable Suicide Safety Plan⁶⁰ • Hope for Wellness Helpline⁶¹ 1-855-242-3310 (Indigenous Resource) • List of crisis services across Canada⁶² • Kids Help Phone⁶³
S - Safety (from injury and violence)	<p>When considering perceptions of neighbourhood safety during the pandemic, younger people were more likely to feel an increase in crime and race-based violence.⁶⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you felt safe in your neighbourhood since the start of the pandemic?”⁶⁵ • “Do you feel vulnerable or at risk of harm because of your culture, race, and/or sexual orientation?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parachute resources for professionals⁶⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis Text Line⁶⁷ Text: HOME to 686868 • Resources on how to prevent injuries⁶⁸
S - Social media	<p>Reports of online sexual exploitation of children have increased by 88% during the pandemic.⁶⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you or a group that you identify with (e.g., culturally, racially, sexually) been picked on or bullied online more often/severely during the pandemic?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying Prevention: The Role of Health Care Providers⁷⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying safe online during the Covid-19 pandemic⁷¹ • Cyberbullying - ways to help youth⁷²

Caring for patients during the pandemic is stressful, and feelings of extreme exhaustion and burnout are normal. For help during these times, see [mental health and well-being supports](#)⁷³ and take care of yourself!

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This Resource was developed by the Centre for Effective Practice and Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto. Clinical leadership for the development of the Resource was provided by Dr. Anna Holland and by the Management of Youth and Young Adult Mood Disorder (Anxiety and Depression) During COVID-19 Working Group. The Managing Chronic Conditions during COVID-19 Advisory Committee provided feedback and input. This Resource was also subject to external review by health care providers and other relevant stakeholders. The development of this Resource was funded by the Government of Ontario as part of the Knowledge Translation in Primary Care.

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