



Youth Mental Health

Top **threats** to your mental health:

- **ACEs** (Adverse Childhood Experiences) which, unaddressed, can quickly lead to:
 - Depression and/or anxiety
 - Suicidal thoughts
 - Addiction
 - Criminal activity
- **Perception of pressure to “succeed”** (mostly from adults)
- **Perception of pressure to “fit in”** (mostly from peers)
- **Navigating sexual issues** (personal boundaries, sexual identity, sexual preference, social anxiety, body image issues...)
- **Social media use**
- **Risk-taking behaviors**
 - Alcohol or drugs
 - Sexual irresponsibility
 - Violence and criminal activity

Research-backed **antidotes** to threats to your mental health:

- Mindful **meditation**
- Belief in a **Higher Power**
- **“Positive Childhood Experiences”**
- Regular **gratitude** practice (list 3 things you’re grateful for each night before sleep)
- Positive, healthy **personal connections** (build up your support system)
- **Emotional intelligence** & coping skills
- **Somatic experiencing** and/or **Restorative Yoga**

To maintain mental health, these **antidotes** should be practiced

as much or more than

your exposure to the **threats** listed above.

Focus on the solutions.

- **Take charge of your social media.** Remove unhealthy influences from your feed and add positive influences which promote the antidotes listed above. Non-profits often have very informative & helpful social media feeds, including churches, adolescent treatment facilities, government agencies, and schools. Refer to our website for good organizations to follow on socials. Try to achieve the goal of a minimum of 60% of your social media feed being positive and healthy.
- **Take control of how you spend your time.** To the extent that you can control it, decrease the time you spend with people who make you feel “less than” or “not enough” and increase the time you spend with people who pour life and love into you. You may want to find and join a 12-step program or support group; they can be SUPER helpful! Church groups and athletic clubs or teams are also good sources of positive people in your life.
- **Create your own “Positive Childhood Experiences.”** Plan joyful, positive, low-tension events for yourself and your friends or find a positive group to join & actively participate in. (church youth group, club at school, athletic team, a charitable cause you’re passionate about...). You could also look for community & nonprofit events that are fun, positive and healthy.
- **Study & learn more about emotional intelligence & coping skills** (such as mindful meditation, yoga, positive playlists, journaling, personal boundaries, labelling & allowing your emotions, focusing on the positive in every situation, acceptance, self-care, aromatherapy, somatic experiencing, re-parenting, etc.).
- **Proactively address your ACEs.** Figure out your “ACE Score” (<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean>) and seek opportunities for therapy & guidance from qualified professionals. Your professional resources are your school counselor, church pastoral staff, Child Advocacy Centers, Covenant House NOLA, & New Orleans Family Justice Center.
- Research “**somatic experiencing**” as a free, do-it-yourself, therapy option for addressing your ACEs. A practical book with exercises you can do is *Healing Trauma* by Peter Levine. Restorative yoga is often a very healing movement experience. Look for classes on YouTube or contact Listen to Kids about local, in person classes.
- Studies show that if you simply have ONE supportive adult in your life that you can trust, you are INCREDIBLY more likely to overcome adversity to become a healthy adult. **Choose and pursue a healthy adult mentor.** If it’s not the right fit, if they seem to be taking more than they’re giving to you, let go of them and look for a new mentor.
- Even if you’re an atheist or agnostic, you can practice “**let go and let God**” by acknowledging which of your circumstances are beyond your control and releasing them to a Higher Power, which you can call “Fate” or “the Universe.” A friend imagines Morgan Freeman as her Higher Power.

Listen to Kids offers **Counseling Scholarships** and works to supply your **Requests for General Help!!!**

To apply for either, go to www.listentokids.org and complete the forms under “Find Help.”

Our website also provides tons of additional resources and information on mental health, especially addressing ACEs, which often result in PTSD.

Resources

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean>

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

<https://www.childandadolescent.org/positive-childhood-experiences/>

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/03/science-resilience>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589537018300609>

<https://www.unicef.org/stories/social-media-bad-teens-mental-health>

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015). *Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper No. 13*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.