



World Health
Organization

unicef 
for every child

Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit

Strategies to promote and protect adolescent mental health
and reduce self-harm and other risk behaviours



Executive Summary

Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit

Strategies to promote and protect adolescent mental health
and reduce self-harm and other risk behaviours

Helping adolescents thrive toolkit: strategies to promote and protect adolescent mental health and reduce self-harm and other risk behaviours. Executive summary

ISBN (WHO) 978-92-4-002624-7 (electronic version)

ISBN (WHO) 978-92-4-002625-4 (print version)

ISBN (UNICEF) 978-92-806-5222-2

© World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021

This joint report reflects the activities of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Some rights reserved. This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo>).

Under the terms of this licence, you may copy, redistribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, provided the work is appropriately cited, as indicated below. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that WHO or UNICEF endorses any specific organization, products or services. The unauthorized use of the WHO or UNICEF names or logos is not permitted. If you adapt the work, then you must license your work under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If you create a translation of this work, you should add the following disclaimer along with the suggested citation: "This translation was not created by the World Health Organization (WHO) or the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Neither WHO nor UNICEF are responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition shall be the binding and authentic edition".

Any mediation relating to disputes arising under the licence shall be conducted in accordance with the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization (<http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules>).

Suggested citation. Helping adolescents thrive toolkit: strategies to promote and protect adolescent mental health and reduce self-harm and other risk behaviours. Executive summary. Geneva: World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021. Licence: [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo).

Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data. CIP data are available at <http://apps.who.int/iris>.

Sales, rights and licensing. To purchase WHO publications, see <http://apps.who.int/bookorders>. To submit requests for commercial use and queries on rights and licensing, see <http://www.who.int/about/licensing>.

Third-party materials. If you wish to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, it is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for that reuse and to obtain permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

WHO Photographs. WHO photographs are copyrighted and are not to be reproduced in any medium without obtaining prior written permission. Permissions may be granted for one-time use in a context that accurately represents the real situation and identity of all human beings depicted. UNICEF and WHO photographs are not to be used in any commercial context; content may not be digitally altered to change meaning or context; assets may not be archived by any non-WHO or non-UNICEF entity. Requests for permission to reproduce UNICEF photographs should be addressed to UNICEF, Division of Communication, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York 10017, USA (email: nyhqdoc.permit@unicef.org). Requests for permission to reproduce WHO photographs should be addressed to: http://www.who.int/about/licensing/copyright_form/en/

General disclaimers. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WHO or UNICEF concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted and dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

The mention of specific companies or of certain manufacturers' products does not imply that they are endorsed or recommended by WHO or UNICEF in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned. Errors and omissions excepted, the names of proprietary products are distinguished by initial capital letters.

All reasonable precautions have been taken by WHO and UNICEF to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the reader. In no event shall WHO or UNICEF be liable for damages arising from its use.

Design and layout by OneBigRobot.



**Executive
summary**

Adolescence is a period of rapid development during which individuals experience profound physical, social and psychological changes and during which the maturing brain is highly susceptible to environmental influences (1). As such, adolescence offers great potential for health promotion and preventive interventions to influence health and developmental outcomes (2), and to influence young lives positively in the short and long term, and into the next generation (3).

A renewed focus on creating a supportive environment that enables positive mental health for adolescents is urgently needed. By effectively implementing a comprehensive set of strategies to support adolescent mental health, young people will enjoy improved well-being and will be able to realize their potential and participate meaningfully in their communities (4).

Overview

Helping Adolescents Thrive

Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) is a joint WHO-UNICEF initiative to strengthen programming and policy responses for adolescents, to promote positive mental health, prevent mental health conditions, and prevent self-harm and other risk behaviours. The vision of HAT is a world in which all adolescents, their caregivers, civil society and communities unite with governments to protect and promote adolescent mental health. This means taking action routinely to implement and monitor evidence-informed and human rights-based strategies for improving mental health, and to prevent and reduce mental health and substance use conditions in adolescents in order to improve lifelong well-being (5). This is in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 3.4, namely: “to reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention

and treatment and promote mental health and well-being” and, within this target, to reduce suicide mortality (indicator 3.4.2) by 2030. This is also in line with the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 (6) and the Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to support country implementation (7).

Approach

The HAT toolkit

This guidance document, the HAT toolkit, has been developed to improve programming for adolescent mental health promotion and prevention and to support the implementation of the WHO HAT guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents. The toolkit describes evidence-informed approaches for promoting positive mental health, preventing mental health conditions, and reducing engagement in self-harm and risk behaviours.

The HAT toolkit is informed by the social ecological model, highlighting the importance of addressing risk factors at individual, family, community and societal levels to promote and protect adolescent mental health, with due attention to sociocultural contexts and care systems. The toolkit describes core principles that should guide programming efforts – including ensuring that responses are equitable and inclusive, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive, developmentally appropriate and guided by adolescents’ evolving capacities, and that they actively involve both adolescents and their parents/caregivers in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of programming, and not only as beneficiaries. It is critical to plan for large-scale implementation beginning from the planning phase for roll-out of the HAT strategies.

Actions

The HAT strategies and cross-cutting activities

The HAT toolkit describes four interlinked strategies and two implementation approaches. These include implementation tools to support the work of programme managers. Country implementation case examples are also provided.

Strategies

Implementation approaches

Strategy 1

Implementation and enforcement of policies and laws

Strategy 2

Environments to promote and protect adolescent mental health

Strategy 3

Caregiver support

Strategy 4

Adolescent psychosocial interventions

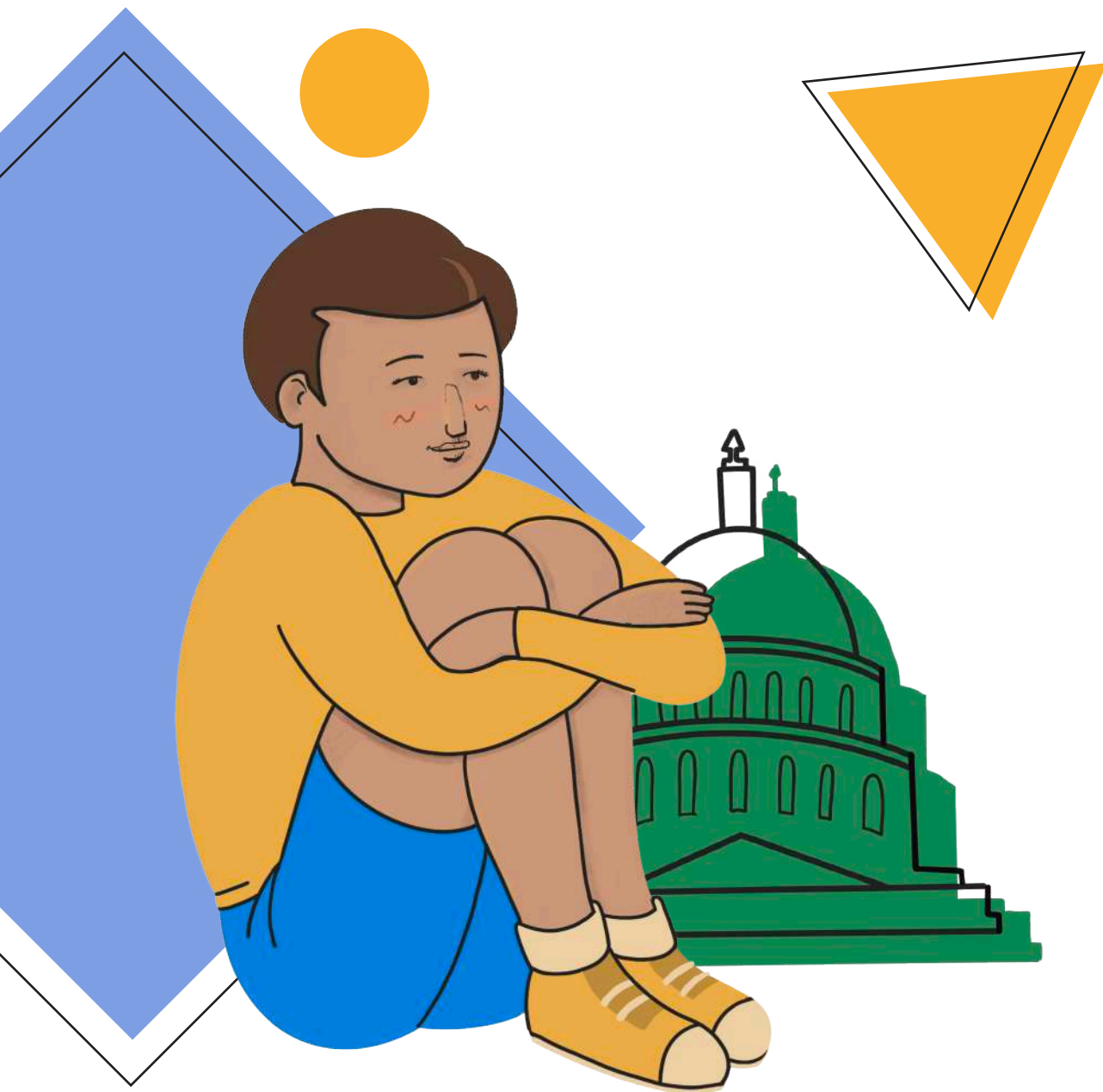
Activity 1
Multisectoral collaboration

Activity 2
Monitoring and evaluation

Strategy 1

Implementation and enforcement of policies and laws

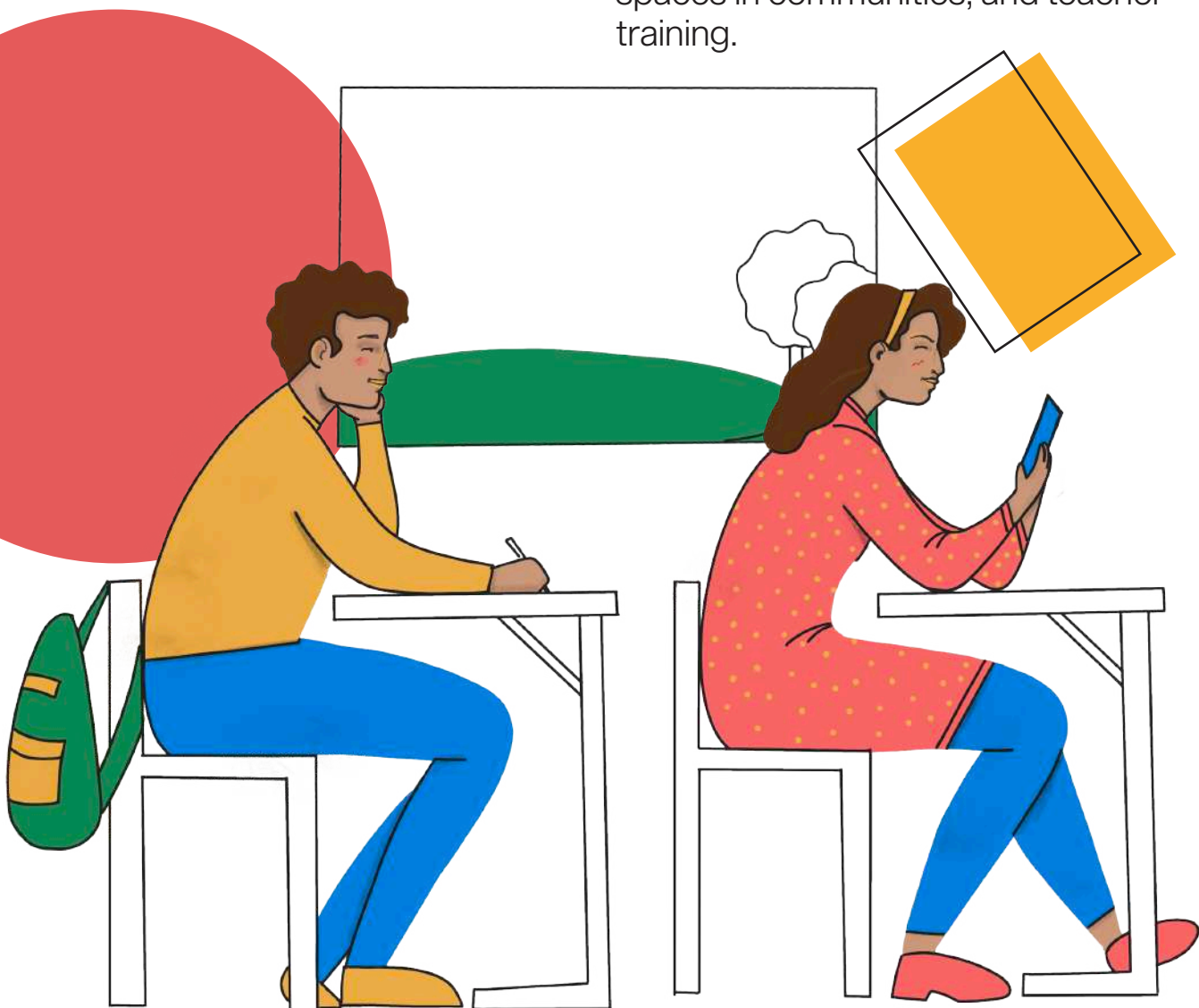
provides guidance on, and examples of, laws and policy provisions to improve adolescent mental health outcomes, embracing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.



Strategy 2

Environments to promote and protect adolescent mental health

focuses on actions to improve the quality of environments in schools, communities and digital spaces. This strategy seeks to enhance adolescents' physical and social environments, where indicated, through a range of evidence-based activities such as school climate interventions, adolescent safe spaces in communities, and teacher training.



Strategy 3

Caregiver support

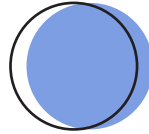
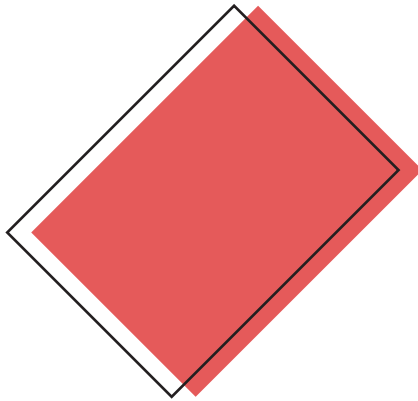
refers to interventions to: build caregivers' knowledge and skills for promoting adolescents' mental health; strengthen caregivers' and adolescents' relationships; and support caregivers' own mental health and well-being.



Strategy 4

Adolescent psychosocial interventions

focuses on evidence-based psychosocial interventions for universal, targeted and indicated mental health prevention.



For each of these strategies, a rationale is provided, followed by a description of various evidence-informed approaches, considerations for implementation and relevant resources.

The two implementation approaches are:

Activity 1 Multisectoral collaboration

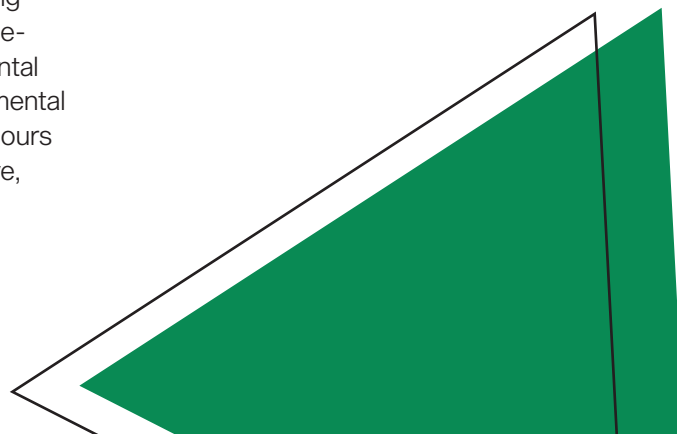
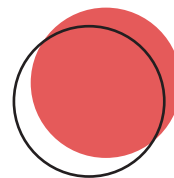
Describes how to develop collaboration between multiple sectors and stakeholders –public, private and civil society– at national and local levels to support the development and implementation of preventive and promotive mental health programming for adolescents.

Activity 2 Monitoring and evaluation

Provides a breakdown of how to develop a monitoring and evaluation system which can provide policy-makers and programme managers with critical information on whether programmes and policies are being implemented as intended and are having their intended impact.

For both activities, an overview section is provided, followed by specific considerations for adolescent mental health programming, a step-by-step process for implementation, and links to relevant resources.

Finally, the HAT toolkit provides an essential resource guide to support the implementation of a whole-of-society approach as a means to achieving the goal of ensuring that all adolescents, including those living in situations of vulnerability, benefit from evidence-informed strategies to promote their positive mental health, prevent suicide and the development of mental health conditions, and engagement in risk behaviours such as self-harm, substance use, and aggressive, disruptive and oppositional behaviours.



References

1. The adolescent brain: a second window of opportunity. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research; 2017 (<https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/933-the-adolescent-brain-a-second-window-of-opportunity-a-compendium.html>, accessed 3 March 2021).
2. Bailey D, Duncan GJ, Odgers CL, Yu W. Persistence and fadeout in the impacts of child and adolescent interventions. *J Res Educ Eff.* 2017;10(1):739.
3. Patton GC, Sawyer SM, Santelli JS, Ross DA, Afifi R, Allen NB et al. Our future: a Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. *Lancet.* 2016;387(10036):2423–78.
4. Jané-Llopis E, Barry M, Hosman C, Patel V. Mental health promotion works: a review. *Promotion & Education.* 2005;12(2_suppl):9–25.
5. Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336864>, accessed 3 March 2021).
6. Comprehensive mental health action plan 2013–2020. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2013.
7. Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!): guidance to support country implementation. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017.

Contact

World Health Organization
Mental Health and Substance Use
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

mailto:brainhealth@who.int
<https://www.who.int/health-topics/brain-health>

