

Adolescent Health:

Think, Act, Grow



2015 Playbook





A call to action to promote the health of America's 42 million adolescents

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Healthy Adolescents

Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow (TAG) is a national call to action to improve health, to reduce risky behavior, and to promote engagement and healthy development among young people. The adolescent years (ages 10-19) and the transition to young adulthood are important times for promoting current and life-long health.

While teens are generally healthy, behavioral and mental health problems, alcohol and drug misuse, injuries, violence, obesity and other challenges sideline too many young people. TAG calls for adults from all walks of life to make the health, safety, and development of adolescents a high priority. TAG is aimed at helping ensure achievement of national health objectives set forth in Healthy People 2020, the National Prevention Strategy, and other national plans.

TAG provides a framework for action.

The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services systematically gathered input from national leaders working in after-school or community programs, education, faith-based organizations, health care, public health, and social

services who reach a large number of adolescents. These leaders developed the elements of the Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents. With additional input from groups representing parents, families and teens, the national organizations' leaders crafted action steps appropriate for their field to use as they work with adolescents. The action steps are built on research findings, best practices, and experience from previous initiatives aimed at improving adolescent health.

Adolescence is a time of rapid change and development. It is the time for adults and all organizations that serve youth to be involved and stay involved. Just as good health means that adolescents are ready to learn and grow, meaningful, supportive relationships, places, and experiences can help prevent risky behavior and provide opportunities for swift intervention when problems emerge.

*It's time for you
and your organization to
get in the game and join
the TAG Team!*





Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents

The leading causes of death and disability for adolescents and young adults are largely preventable. The broad game plan is clear. Experts convened by the Office of Adolescent Health agree that adolescents flourish when they have:

➔ Positive connections with supportive people

Adolescents crave safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with supportive adults, whether those are parents, coaches, neighbors, grandparents, teachers, program leaders, or mentors. These types of connections are important for all teens and may be difficult for at-risk youth to find and sustain.

➔ Safe and secure places to live, learn, and play

Schools, neighborhoods, and community settings can foster and support healthy adolescent development across the spectrum, including physical and mental health, social interactions, and cognitive growth. Adolescents also benefit from safe places to congregate, enjoy social, athletic and other recreational activities, and just be with their peers.

➔ Access to high-quality, teen-friendly health care

Adolescents benefit from access to high-quality medical and dental care, mental and behavioral health services, and to health care providers who understand adolescent health and development. Young patients prefer health services that are youth-friendly, culturally competent, affordable, convenient, and confidential. Health care that is adolescent-centered and involves parents, but allows for increased autonomy as adolescents reach their late teens, is ideal.

➔ Opportunities for teens to engage as learners, leaders, team members, and workers

Active youth involvement with people and programs is important for promoting healthy adolescent development. This includes activities at school, at home, or in the community, such as school clubs, sports, music, visual and performing arts, or out-of-school time programs, volunteer or paid jobs, and activities at places of worship. Adolescents also benefit from opportunities to shape programs and activities, which can improve the programs, provide valuable leadership skills and build confidence.

➔ Coordinated adolescent- and family-centered services, as needed

Adolescents enter health and social service systems in many ways and at different stages. Integrated and coordinated services can help ensure better health outcomes and support healthy development for adolescents. Unfortunately, the systems for providing services and supports to adolescents are often fragmented, spread across government agencies, nonprofit organizations, health care providers, businesses, and faith-based organizations. A more coherent, integrated approach to fostering health and healthy development would benefit all teens.

THE PLAYERS:

Today's Adolescents

There are 42 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 in the United States.¹ That's one out of every eight Americans. According to U.S. Census data, about 51 percent of adolescents are male and 49 percent are female. Nearly half of adolescents are between ages 10-14 (49.2 percent) and slightly more than half are between the ages 15-19 (50.8 percent).²

Nationally, the United States is undergoing a demographic shift. The overall proportion of adolescents who are minority is increasing. For example, it is projected that by 2050, about one in three adolescents will be Hispanic.³ The graphic below represents the racial/ethnic background of adolescents in the United States in 2013.⁴

Many teens live in metropolitan areas. Just over one in four adolescents (26 percent) lived in the main city, in a metropolitan area. More than one in seven adolescents (14 percent) live in a metropolitan area, more than one in seven adolescents (14 percent) lived in a nonmetropolitan area.⁵

Nearly 8.2 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 are estimated to have special health care needs or disabilities, ranging from chronic health conditions such as asthma and attention deficit disorder to severe physical and developmental disabilities.⁵

➔ Beyond the numbers

Social and economic factors, such as education and income levels; health behaviors, such as tobacco use and diet and exercise; access to high-quality health care; and healthy and safe environments all contribute to an adolescent's overall health.⁶ For all teens, positive influences and relationships during the adolescent years can set a course for good health throughout life.^{7,8}

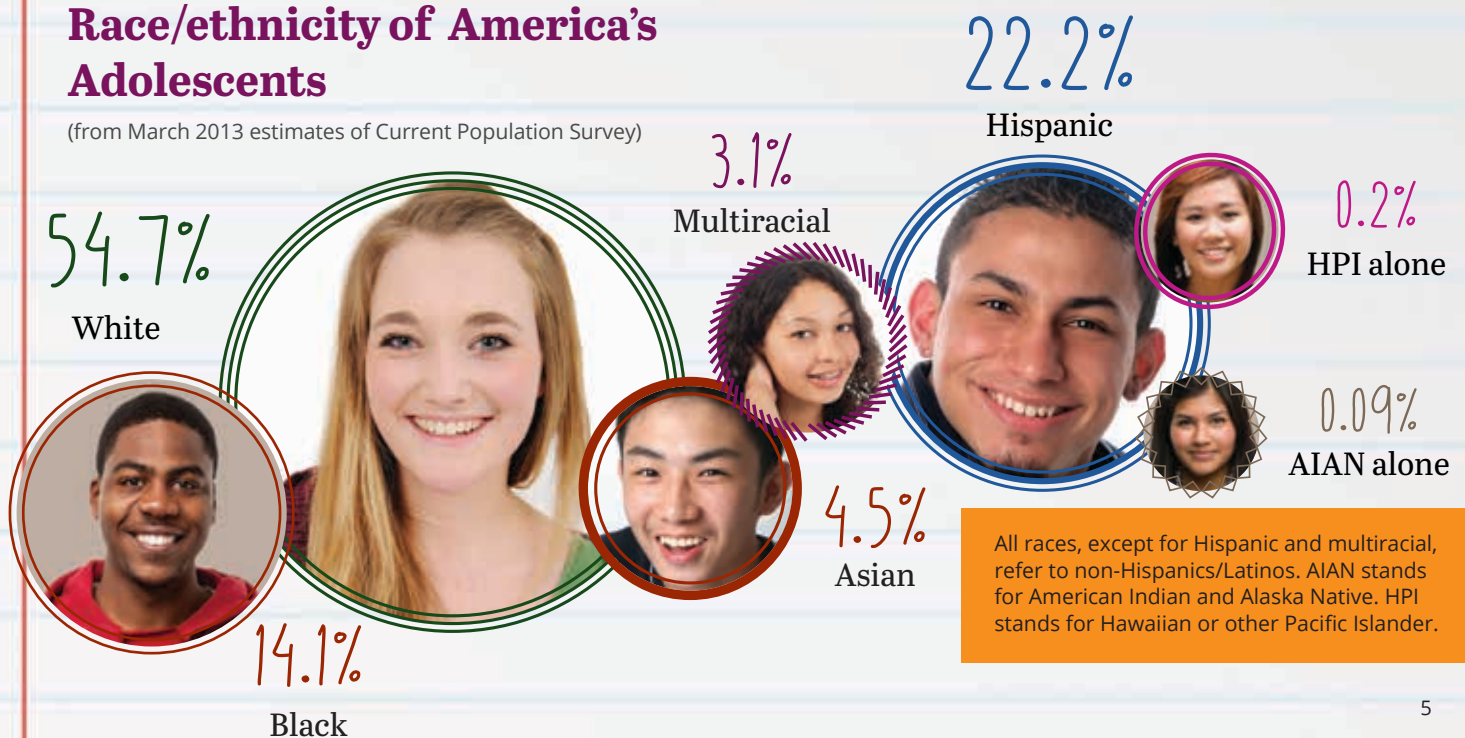
Members of racial and ethnic minority groups, in general, are more likely to lack a usual source of health care, experience more serious health conditions, and have higher rates of mortality than whites. It is critically important to address health disparities related to race and ethnicity now to ensure a healthy America in the future.⁹

Any young person can be vulnerable to adverse health outcomes, and those living in poverty are particularly at risk. Roughly one in five adolescents (19 percent) between the ages 10-19 lived below the federal poverty line in 2012.¹⁰

Education and health are closely connected. Americans with fewer years of education generally have poorer health and shorter lives.¹¹ Although high-school graduation rates have increased since the 2007-2008 academic year, from 75 percent to 81 percent (see graph on page 5); in 2012, seven percent of all 16- to 17-year-olds had dropped out of school without earning a diploma or GED.¹²

Race/ethnicity of America's Adolescents

(from March 2013 estimates of Current Population Survey)



Who do America's adolescents live with

(from February 2013 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey)

64%

Live with both parents

6%

Live with neither parent

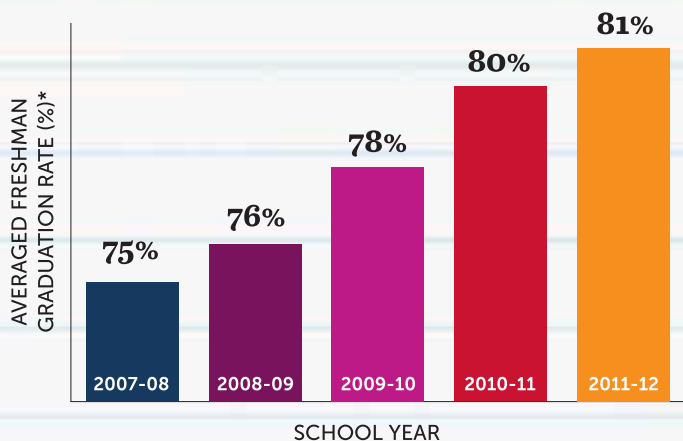
30%

Live with one parent



Public high school graduation rates

(from the 2012 Digest of Education Statistics)



*The number of students who graduated that year divided by the number of freshmen four years earlier.

➔ Don't Leave Youth on the Sidelines

Youth who are children of immigrants or refugees, or who are homeless, living in foster care, involved with the juvenile justice system, or identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ), may need special support and attention to their health care and development.

Juvenile justice system. There were about 1.5 million juvenile delinquency cases in 2009,¹³ and nearly 1.7 million youth between the ages 10-17 were arrested in 2010.¹⁴

Foster care. In 2012, about 44 percent of the nearly 400,000 children in foster care in the United States were between ages of 10-20.¹⁵

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning adolescents. Among adolescents ages 18-19, just under eight percent of females and just under three percent of males identified as homosexual or bisexual in 2008.¹⁶

Homeless. In the 2010-2011 school year, about one million students between the ages 6-18 were homeless.¹⁷

Disabilities. Among youth under the age of 18, adolescents ages 12-17 have the highest prevalence of special health care needs (18 percent). A higher percentage of males under the age of 18 are estimated to have special healthcare needs than females (17 percent versus 13 percent).¹⁸





➔ Trends for the Upcoming Season

Efforts to improve health outcomes for adolescents are occurring against a backdrop of evolving policies and practices, demographic changes, and other trends.

Health care. Access to and use of health care can significantly improve adolescent health and prevent onset of some problems in the future. Continuous health insurance coverage, with access to preventive and behavioral health services, can mean better control of chronic problems and prevention or management of issues that can disrupt school attendance or healthy development.¹⁹

Health care systems are increasingly focused on ways to increase the efficiency and quality of health care. Initiatives such as establishing medical homes for youth with special needs, better integrating and coordinating health care with behavioral care and social services, and giving increased attention to managing transitions from pediatric to adult health care can benefit young patients.

Prevention. Preventive health care services during adolescence can help protect youth and identify problems early. In 2011, nearly one in five adolescents (18 percent) did not receive any preventive medical care visits.²⁰ Research shows that even those who saw a health care professional for medical care did not always receive all the recommended screenings and anticipatory guidance on relevant health behaviors for this age group.^{21,22} Rates for immunizations, dental care, and screening for smoking and other risky behaviors remain low. Risk assessments delivered in health care settings can quickly screen teens for multiple risks, and the provider can use patient responses to focus care.

Health insurance. Most young people under age 18 have health insurance, and access to health coverage for millions of young adults expanded with implementation of the Affordable Care Act.²⁰ About nine out of 10 white, black, and Asian adolescents had insurance (93 percent, 91 percent, and 92 percent respectively), and eight in 10 Hispanic adolescents (80 percent) had health insurance in 2013.²³

Health plans offered in the Health Insurance Marketplace include mental health and substance abuse care, and vision and dental care for children under age 19 along with benefits such as medical visits and hospital care. Patients cannot be turned down for insurance due to a pre-existing medical condition, and insurers cannot impose annual or lifetime dollar limits on care.²⁴

As teens approach adulthood, many still lose health care coverage if they cannot stay on a parent's plan until age 26, or if they live in a state that has not extended Medicaid coverage to childless adults. This gap in coverage also affects populations such as young adults who "age out" of foster care and youth who are disconnected from care by immigration status or other circumstances.

Social media and technology. The increasing use of social media permeates the fabric of adolescents' daily lives, affecting where they get information and how they spend their time. The effects of social media on adolescent development are not yet fully understood. With improved ability to connect and share information using new technologies, there are increased opportunities to break down silos and collaborate across health care, social services, education, or other sectors, and possibly opportunities to put health-promoting information onto the screens of devices so popular with adolescents. Concerns about teens' social media and technology use include texting while driving, exposure to mature content, and limiting personal interaction.

Community prevention. Many communities are creating opportunities for prevention. There is increased attention to fitness and healthy eating, clean air and water, and safe, affordable housing. There is community-wide planning to implement policies and practices that support healthy living, including ensuring tobacco-free environments, initiatives that support walking and biking, and efforts to prevent injuries.

Improving fitness and nutrition. Understanding of nutrition is changing, as is what is needed to support life-long physical fitness and health. Major efforts are underway that are raising awareness, increasing opportunities, and developing policies to support better physical fitness and nutrition for all Americans, especially younger children and adolescents.

Physical activity guidelines for children ages 6-17 recommend at least one hour a day of physical activity that includes aerobic activities and activities to strengthen muscles and build strong bones.²⁵ About 92 percent of school districts require that high schools teach physical education.²⁶

Schools increasingly play a role in making sure children are well-nourished and eating healthy foods. Schools with low-income students provide food to eligible students through the



school meal programs, which in some areas continue during school and summer breaks.²⁷ For some youth, these programs are their primary source of nourishment. Many schools are increasing access to healthier foods through initiatives ranging from planting gardens to upgrading foods in the cafeteria, and changing suppliers to bring in fresh foods that are prepared on-site.

Education. Educators, health care professionals, parents, and others are increasingly recognizing the connection between healthy students, a healthy school climate, and academic outcomes. As one report notes, "Healthy, active and well-nourished children are more likely to attend school, be engaged, and be ready to learn."²⁸

Although some schools face significant financial and staffing challenges, others provide a school nurse and a counselor along with educational staff. Requirements for school health professionals vary across states, and this lack of standard credentials may affect the services available at schools. Most school systems offer health education classes; however, there is wide variation in the curricula for health education across schools, districts, and states.²⁹

In addition, a school's environment, such as air quality or the location, age, condition, and physical layout of the building can also affect student health.

FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG

➔ Practice Both Offense and Defense

Experimentation and risk-taking are a part of life and play a role in adolescent development. Taking some chances helps adolescents establish their identities. Experiencing success allows teens to learn what worked well. A failure gives them a chance to think through what they might do differently next time. Adolescents have limited life experiences, so a disappointment or embarrassment may seem overwhelming. When something does not go as planned, having a trusted adult to talk to can help a young person figure out how to make it right or bounce back.

When it comes to adolescent health, the focus is often on preventing potentially harmful actions. Yet, adolescent development experts point out that there are positive risks teens should take. Trying out for a team, joining a new club or activity, volunteering or working, taking a harder class in school, and making new friends are all examples of positive risk-taking and are usually a healthy part of growing up.^{30,31}

Teens who are engaged in learning and in meaningful activities, who have a good self-concept and have control of their emotions, who live in stable situations, and who are healthy and safe benefit from protective factors or strengths, which help them learn and grow when they take positive risks.

Then there are negative risk factors, such as alcohol, tobacco and drug use; unsafe driving; violence; sexual activity; and mental health problems that leave parents worried and communities troubled. Indeed, studies suggest that half of all behavioral risks first appear during adolescence.³² Yet statistics do not give much sense of what is going on with an individual young person or what's happening in a school or neighborhood.

Further analysis of the risk factors included in 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System data provides some interesting insights. It shows that about half of high school students reported engaging in no or one risky behavior during the prior year.³³ On the other hand, nearly one in four (23 percent) reported engaging in four, five or more risky behaviors during the same time period (see graph to the right).³³

It's challenging for caring adults to figure out how best to respond to an individual or small group of young people when negative behavior occurs. Is the behavior an issue

that if caught early will not reoccur, or is it a warning sign of a much more serious problem? There are no easy "one-size-fits-all" answers, but some clusters of risky behaviors should alert adults to the possibility of negative outcomes.

One study looked at the ways that risky behaviors may cluster together in some young people:

- Just eight percent of high school students in 2007 reported frequent tobacco use. But among those frequent smokers, 75 percent reported problem alcohol behavior, 70 percent reported recent marijuana use, and more than 60 percent reported other drug use.³⁴
- Among the eight percent of teens who reported in 2007 that they had sexual intercourse before age 13, more than 40 percent were in two or more fights during the past year and the same percentage reported carrying a weapon to school, feeling persistently sad, having unprotected sex, engaging in problem alcohol behavior, marijuana use, or having tried other drugs.³⁵

Figuring out which teens are engaging in negative risks is complex. A teen with many risky behaviors may be one who needs serious attention from caring professionals, and who may benefit from behavioral counseling and coordinated follow-up services.

Number of risky behaviors among adolescents

(from analysis of 2011/2012 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System data)

0 to 1 risk behaviors

50%

2 risk behaviors

16%

3 risk behaviors

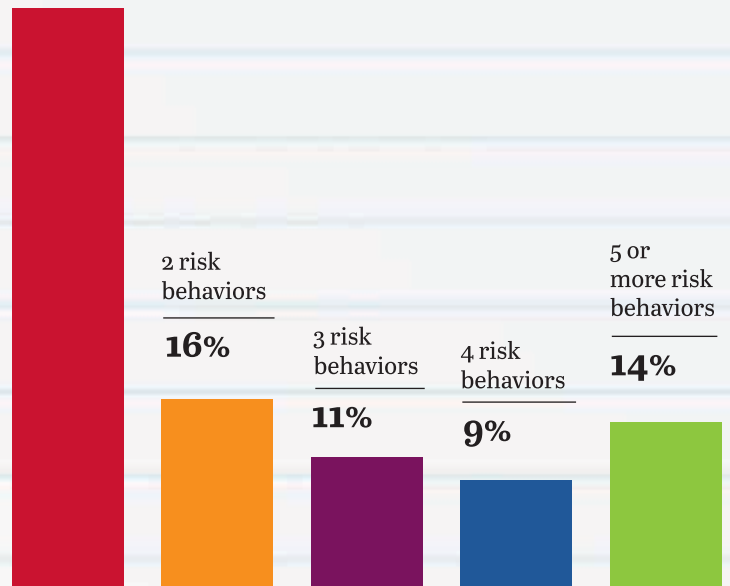
11%

4 risk behaviors

9%

5 or more risk behaviors

14%



Get into the Game!

Improving adolescents' health and supporting their healthy development is often a team effort. TAG calls upon organizations and individuals working with adolescents in after school or community activities, education, faith-based organizations, health care, public health and social services to prioritize activities that improve adolescent health. The Office of Adolescent Health solicited the input of professionals from these sectors to identify the following action steps. Whether working with adolescents one-to-one, leading small groups, overseeing large systems that touch adolescents' lives or working behind the scenes to ensure wise policies and proven practices, we all play a role on the TAG team.

➔ What Can I do?

Health care Professionals

- Make health care offices friendly and welcoming to adolescents.
- Ask adolescents the hard questions and use risk screening tools.
- Make preventive services for adolescents a priority.
- Maintain referral sources for youth with chronic conditions, special needs, and behavioral health issues.
- Improve and update training on adolescent health for all staff.
- Facilitate smooth transitions from adolescent to adult health care settings.
- Be a leader in building partnerships in the community with others who serve youth.

Public Health Professionals

- Provide leadership for developing community-wide approaches to promoting adolescent health.
- Conduct, or provide data for, community health assessments to identify adolescent health needs.
- Focus on risk reduction activities for adolescents.
- Train staff on the latest techniques for working with adolescents more effectively.
- Promote a positive, strengths-based view of adolescents.
- Engage young people in being responsible for their own health as well as in promoting healthy communities.

Out-of-school and Community-based Program Professionals

- Help youth connect to supportive adults, positive peers, schools and the community.
- Create a safe, inviting, fun and enriching space for adolescents.
- Create positive incentives for youth to participate in programming.
- Encourage adolescents to be physically active and have good nutrition.
- Be another set of eyes and provide a listening ear to adolescents.
- Share local health resources with youth.
- Teach youth about staying healthy and safe.
- Provide opportunities for youth to offer input.
- Build leadership skills into program design and activities.
- Join with others in your community to improve and coordinate service delivery for adolescents.



Education Professionals

- Create a supportive and safe school climate for adolescents.
- Strengthen or increase offerings and activities that support adolescents' healthy development.
- Support teens' social and emotional development.
- Be a health resource for adolescent students and their families.
- Implement annual health and safety assessments and coordinate with community efforts.
- Ensure schools are environmentally-healthy settings for adolescents to learn in.
- Provide after-school activities and places where students can study after school hours.
- Use open spaces to encourage adolescents to be physically active.

Faith-based Community Professionals

- Connect adolescents to supportive adults.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to connect with peers in a safe environment.
- Provide adolescents with opportunities to serve others.
- Support the role of families in healthy adolescent development.
- Connect young people to health information and resources.
- Encourage youth to have healthy habits.
- Offer youth services or refer youth and their families to meet immediate needs.
- Facilitate opportunities for youth skill training, internships and employment.
- Support adolescents' spiritual growth.

Social Service Professionals

- Encourage positive connections between youth and supportive adults.
- Ensure services and programs for adolescents that are welcoming and developmentally appropriate.
- Encourage adolescents to learn about their health.
- Help adolescents connect with trusted health care and mental health professionals.
- Provide opportunities for youth to offer input.
- Build leadership skills into program design and activities.
- Join with others in your community to improve and coordinate service delivery for adolescents.
- Stay abreast of the latest research and implement best practices in working with adolescents.

Parents, Grandparents, Families and Caregivers

- Ensure adolescents receive primary health, dental, mental and behavioral health services as needed.
- Maintain open and continuous dialogue with adolescents.
- Learn what to expect with your adolescent's development.
- Be a good role model for adolescents.
- Encourage limits on technology use, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and good nutrition.
- Help adolescents learn how to take care of their health and advocate for themselves.
- Make time for the adolescents in your life.

Things Teens Can Do to Be Healthy

- Go to the doctor and the dentist regularly.
- Learn how to get the health care services you need.
- Make healthy habits a priority.
- Get involved in activities such as music, clubs, exercise, sports, and volunteering.
- Find a trusted mentor, guide, or advisor.
- Be available to help and listen to others.
- Make good choices.
- Maintain positive relationships with friends and family.

Positive youth development models can greatly increase the effectiveness and impact of work with adolescents. A suggested formula³⁶ is:

Positive experiences
+
Positive relationships
+
Positive environments =
Positive youth development.

➔ What's the Score?

Beginning in 1980, the United States established national health objectives each decade to guide action to improve health, and to track progress. Healthy People 2020 is the current centerpiece of efforts to improve and measure health outcomes in the United States. For the first time, Healthy People includes a set of objectives aimed at improving the healthy development, health, safety, and well-being of adolescents and young adults.³⁷ Progress toward achieving the objectives is routinely tracked and reported. TAG is one activity focused on helping achieve these important national objectives.

In addition to the adolescent health objectives shown below, there are specific objectives for topics, such as reducing deaths from vehicle crashes or reducing the proportion of adolescents who report binge drinking.



Healthy People 2020: Adolescent Health Objectives

INCREASE THE PROPORTION OF ADOLESCENTS WHO:

- Had a wellness checkup in the past 12 months
- Participate in extracurricular and/or out-of-school activities
- Are connected to a parent or other positive adult caregiver
 - Transition to self-sufficiency from foster care

REDUCE:

- The proportion of public schools with a serious violent incident
- Adolescent and young adult perpetration of, and victimization by, crimes
- The proportion of adolescents who have been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property

INCREASE:

- Educational achievement of adolescents and young adults
- The proportion of schools with a school breakfast program
 - The proportion of adolescents whose parents consider them to be safe at school
- The proportion of middle and high schools that prohibit harassment based on a student's sexual orientation or gender identity

➔ Roles for Health Care Professionals

Health care professionals are on the front lines for ensuring adolescent health and development, and can adopt several strategies for improving adolescent health outcomes.

Make health care offices friendly and welcoming.

Consider adolescents when selecting décor, furniture and reading materials for your office. Provide take-home information in smaller formats (e.g., postcards, bookmarks) that can be tucked in wallets or purses discreetly, and offer information in private settings. Set office hours to accommodate busy school schedules. Bring services to schools whenever feasible. Train all staff, including clerical and paraprofessionals, in how to welcome and interact with adolescents.

Ask hard questions and use risk-screening tools.

Use screening protocols to ask adolescents about sensitive topics, such as weight; sexual orientation or behavior; mental health issues; drug, alcohol and tobacco use; and violence or victimization. Use assessments that identify strengths as well as risky behavior. Integrate confidentiality policies into health care practices to improve patient care. Establish and implement follow-up procedures to see if patients obtain the referred services and how patients are doing.

Make preventive services a priority. Ensure adolescents receive recommended clinical preventive services, including immunizations, screenings, and counseling about behaviors that will support their health. Adapt office systems, reminders, standing orders, and other means to ensure recommended preventive care is delivered. Establish policies and procedures for delivering brief interventions.

Maintain referral sources for youth with chronic conditions, special needs, and behavioral health issues. Know who in your community can help with mental health issues, substance use, eating disorders, and other challenges. Make referrals to available services in the community and make sure that some of the services accept Medicaid or have sliding fee scales. Establish and implement follow up procedures to see if the patient obtained the services and how he/she is doing.

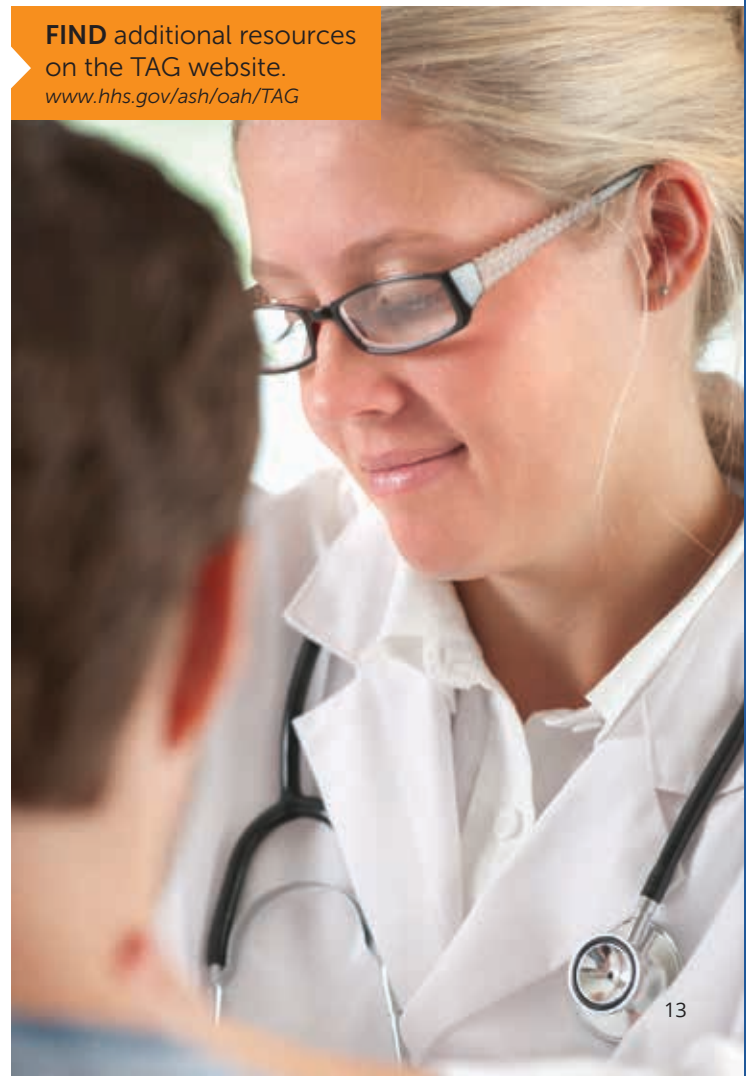
Improve and update training on adolescent health to reflect the latest knowledge on adolescent development, risks and protective factors, and confidentiality laws, including interacting with adolescents who are over 18. Ensure that staff receive training and incorporate this knowledge into services.

Facilitate smooth transitions from adolescent to adult health care settings. Assist adolescent patients with transitions and ensure continuity and quality of care. If an adolescent with special needs or a chronic condition is making the transition to a different health care setting, make referrals to providers who can meet those needs and provide required medical records. Encourage youth and parents to plan for medical coverage during the transition to adulthood. Maintain release forms to allow information to be shared among providers.

Be a leader in building partnerships in the community with others who serve youth.

Promote adolescent health by taking a lead role in coordinating care across systems, including health, education, social services, and other community partners. Identify and engage allies such as the school system, parent-teacher groups, youth groups, non-profit youth-serving organizations, and senior citizens. At-risk youth are often served by multiple providers and systems. Get involved in community efforts to improve adolescent access to health and sex education information, programs that strengthen families and build youth skills, and health centers convenient to schools.

FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG





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➔ Roles for Public Health Professionals

As a public health professional, there are several key ways you can continue to contribute to improving the health and healthy development of America's adolescents.

Provide leadership for developing community-wide approaches to promoting adolescent health. Partner with community organizations, schools, faith-based organizations, businesses, health care providers, local foundations, parents, grandparents, and teens to identify priorities for advancing adolescent health in the community (e.g., activities in parks, safe spaces for adolescents to gather for sports and social events). Leverage grant-making opportunities, trainings, and cross-sector programming to raise awareness across settings and increase attention to improving adolescent health.

Conduct or provide data for community health assessments. Use assessments to identify and describe adolescent health needs, including measuring and tracking adolescent health outcomes. Assessments of local needs may have been completed in response to grant requirements, by community-based initiatives, or by tax-exempt hospitals. Be sure to include adolescent health needs as assessments are conducted or updated. Use and refer to state and local health departments, which routinely collect and maintain data and have benchmarks for adolescent health trends. Use national objectives such as Healthy People 2020 and data on adolescent health that are readily available to inform local assessments and plans.

Focus on risk-reduction activities for adolescents. These include approaches for smoking cessation, addressing substance abuse, mitigating sexual risks, treating mental health problems, identifying diabetes precursors, and reducing obesity. Ensure adolescents,

parents and others working with adolescents understand risky behaviors and the benefits of early, brief and sustained interventions. Identify resources that can help reduce risky behaviors, and refer teens as appropriate. Use evidence-based approaches when available.

Train staff on working with adolescents using the latest knowledge about what is effective. Provide training on cultural competency, trauma-informed care, working with vulnerable populations, awareness of LGBTQ issues, positive youth development and what is appropriate for younger versus older adolescents. Encourage staff to use positive youth development strategies that support adolescents in their day-to-day lives. Specifically consider the needs of vulnerable adolescent populations, such as runaway, homeless, LGBTQ, immigrant youth and youth with disabilities. Ensure staff working with teens are properly screened and are trained in safety and reporting requirements.

Promote a positive, strengths-based view of adolescents. Participate in public awareness campaigns with positive youth development themes. Join ongoing community efforts to encourage and support better adolescent health outcomes by providing appropriate settings, programming, youth engagement and leadership opportunities, and staff training. Look for ways to promote and build on adolescent successes through social and traditional media campaigns.

Help young people take responsibility for their own health and promoting healthy communities. Encourage older adolescents to navigate the health care system, and teach them how. Involve adolescents of all ages in creating and monitoring community programs and activities for adolescents. Support youth engagement and leadership development, which have the potential for creating career pathways into health. Provide internships for youth in public health and health care settings. Work with youth to ensure that strategies and services meet the needs of youth and are youth-friendly. Involve youth in the design of youth programming, materials and media campaigns.

➔ Roles for Out-of-school and Community-based Program Professionals

As an adult working with adolescents in after-school, summertime or community settings, you can help contribute to adolescent health today and into the future.

Help youth connect to supportive adults, positive peers, schools and the community. Encourage youth to connect with supportive adults such as program leaders, coaches, tutors, or mentors as well as peers who can also be mentors. Serve as a role model in your actions, behaviors, and speech. Be an individual resource to adolescents and provide access to space, equipment, or resources to support youth activities. Facilitate community service opportunities with senior citizens, schools and day care centers, and other community projects. Ensure that programs comply with guidelines and rules designed to protect adolescent's safety.

Create a safe, warm and enriching space.

Provide an attractive and safe environment to engage adolescents in positive activities and healthy relationships with peers. Create stability and consistency with well-trained staff, age-appropriate programs, and safe and secure settings. Teach about healthy relationships and encourage a sense of community. Support skill-building activities to contribute to adolescents' overall sense of competence and their future accomplishments. Offer unstructured time where adolescents can just be together.

Encourage physical activity and good nutrition.

Plan group activities that include physical exercise, such as hikes, bike rides, competitive sports, and noncompetitive play such as aerobic, muscle- and bone-strengthening, and cardio-respiratory fitness activities. Establish policies to encourage healthy snacks or meals (as appropriate or needed), and distribute tips for healthy eating.

Be another set of eyes and provide a listening ear.

Keep a lookout for how adolescents are doing in terms of their health and healthy development. Reach out to a young person who seems disengaged or sad. Listen to adolescents talk and help them think about what they could do or say in challenging situations. Guide them to community resources that can help. Maintain confidentiality within legal guidelines.

Share local health resources with youth.

Identify health resources in your community and share them with the adolescents in your programs and activities. Encourage and highlight the importance of wellness visits, vaccinations, dental health, and make sure teens know about suicide and other help lines. Provide individual or group learning sessions on health topics. Refer adolescents to programs or services beyond the scope of your activities (for example, mental health professionals or social service providers).

Teach youth about staying healthy and safe.

Offer special sessions about health and healthy development. For example, bring in speakers and video presentations on online safety, texting, suicide prevention, healthy relationships (with peers, adults and mentors), and offer gender-specific workshops since teen boys and girls are often working through different issues. Allow lots of time for discussion, so teens can work out their opinions about a topic.

FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG

Youth (12-17) participation in after-school activities

(from 2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health)

83%

Participate in 1+ organized activities outside of school

17%

Do not participate in any after-school activities



➔ Roles for Education Professionals

Adults working or volunteering at school have many opportunities to support adolescent health and development.

Create a supportive and safe school climate.

Develop an inclusive, caring, secure, and welcoming climate for adolescents and their families. Make certain that students of every race/ethnicity, gender, disability status and sexual orientation feel safe and supported. Provide opportunities to participate in school leadership and honor youth voices and opinions. Foster a positive physical and psycho-social atmosphere and incorporate that approach into discipline and classroom management policies. Provide all school staff with information about community health resources, referral policies, legal reporting responsibilities and confidentiality laws, regulations and policies.

Strengthen or increase activities that support healthy development.

Infuse positive, healthy development into all aspects of the curriculum. Teach problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Offer music, visual and performing arts, technology, foreign languages, and other courses that build healthy connections between students and their school. Offer the kinds of physical exercise activities during and after school that can be enjoyed into adulthood. If your school does not fund these activities, create partnerships with community-based nonprofits and volunteer groups. Provide healthy options in school meal programs and vending machines.

Support social and emotional development.

Provide all school staff with training on the social and emotional development of adolescents. Teach students how to develop and maintain healthy relationships with peers and adults, which will help minimize bullying and other harmful interactions. Establish procedures that encourage safe reports of bullying and ensure policies are in place to handle these issues. Teach conflict-resolution and anger management skills, which will also help mitigate behavioral challenges and manage classrooms in positive ways.³⁸

Be a health resource for students and their families.

Inform students of health resources available through the school. Encourage parent involvement and promote regular communication between school and home. Share information with families on normal developmental milestones for adolescents, how to encourage healthy behaviors, and how to help their children avoid risky behaviors. Provide this information in appropriate languages and reading levels through newsletters, emails, Web sites, sports teams, the parent-teacher association and parent meetings.

Implement annual health and safety assessments and coordinate with community efforts.

Conduct annual assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses of health and safety policies. Develop an improvement plan and collaborate with teachers, parents, students, public health agencies, and the community to promote health-enhancing behaviors that mitigate risk and maximize protective factors.³⁷

Ensure schools are environmentally-healthy settings for learning.

³⁹ Regularly monitor the school's environmental health to ensure it is free from toxins and other potential hazards, that it is clean, and that the building facilities and classrooms are safe and in good repair. Provide clean and safe water for drinking and washing, minimize unnecessary noise, and be certain indoor and outdoor areas are well-lit. Test air quality for carbon dioxide and dampness, and use green cleaning products.

Use open spaces to promote physical activity.

In addition to physical education classes, use gyms and outdoor spaces such as fields, tracks, and paved areas to encourage physical activity, especially during breaks, lunchtime, and before/after school. Mark paved areas to encourage a variety of games, provide outdoor basketball hoops, and erect appropriate playground structures (especially for younger adolescents). Support community organizations in using the facilities for youth programs during evenings, weekends, and vacations.

FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG

➔ Roles for Faith-based Community Professionals

Adults working with faith-based organizations can help improve adolescents' health and promote their healthy development. Many groups that provide social services are faith-based and offer a range of services to youth and families regardless of their religious beliefs.

Support adolescents' spiritual growth. Convey beliefs and values, recognize milestones through religious rites, and help adolescents connect within their religious community and to the larger world around them. For many youth, spiritual connection may be fostered by participation in community service and other activities to help others that are sponsored by their faith community.

Connect adolescents to adults. Provide adolescents opportunities to meet and connect with members of the community, such as religious leaders or older adults, who can serve as role models or mentors. Offer activities, whether in worship, community service, outreach, music, or other ways, to help them connect with adults. Follow youth leader training and safety requirements of the sponsoring organization.

Provide opportunities for adolescents to connect with peers in a safe environment. Help adolescents establish a network of friendships that can be relied upon in good and bad times. Provide opportunities for youth to connect with peers through regular meetings, recreational and community service activities, and social media. Offer safe and fun spaces for adolescents to gather and share your space with out-of-school-time programs and other activities.

Provide service opportunities. Help youth grow in compassion and develop a sense of responsibility by providing opportunities to serve others in the community who are in need. Examples are providing child care while parents participate in worship or educational programs; packaging, delivering or serving food to the hungry and homeless; and visiting home-bound elderly people or people with disabilities.

Support the role of families in healthy adolescent development. Share ideas for strengthening families. Consider encouraging families to create special customs, such as family nights or holiday celebrations. Provide seasonal events for families to attend and/or family mission or community service opportunities.

Connect young people to health information and resources. Identify and share existing community resources with young people. Offer programs on various aspects of

Today's youth,
tomorrow's
community

adolescent health, such as physical activity, nutrition, social media use or preventive health care. Provide brochures or host special presentations from local health

clinics. Ask congregants who are health providers to speak or provide immunization clinics at your place of worship. Host a blood drive and get teens involved in staffing, publicizing and donating. Share health-related messages with teens and parents through Facebook, Twitter or text message.

Encourage healthy habits. Offer some activities that have a physical exercise component. Engage youth in making the community "greener" and healthier. Provide healthy food choices. Get teens involved in planting and harvesting a community garden and sharing the bounty with community soup kitchens.

Offer youth services or refer youth and their families to services. As appropriate, offer direct services to youth and their families, including health care, mental health, foster care, refugee resettlement support, and education. Make referrals to community resources to help adolescents and their families meet pressing needs for food, shelter, mental health or other health and social supports. Ensure that some of these services accept Medicaid or have a sliding fee scale.

Facilitate opportunities for training and employment. Provide leadership opportunities and training courses in resume writing and job search skills. Facilitate internships or entry-level jobs. Offer employment opportunities directly or reach out to congregants and local businesses for jobs for teens. Use social media and congregation email updates to publicize internship and job opportunities for youth.

Percent of youth age 12-17 old who attend a religious service

(from 2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health)

81%

Attend at least once a year

19%

Never attend religious services



➔ Roles for Social Services Professionals

As a social service provider, you already understand the multiple needs of adolescents and the complexity of the systems available to protect and support them. Appreciate how important what you do may be to the lifelong health of the young people you serve.

Encourage positive connections between youth and supportive adults. Help youth reach out to adults, such as teachers, coaches, religious leaders, relatives, family friends, or older adults, who can serve as mentors or informal counselors. Make referrals to mentoring programs and ensure that mentors are appropriately vetted to ensure youth safety. Encourage youth to participate in healthy extracurricular activities. Support educational and work opportunities for young people.

Ensure services and programs are welcoming and developmentally appropriate. Make sure services and programs are welcoming to adolescents, including youth with disabilities and chronic health conditions. Use a youth-friendly approach that recognizes that teens' need for guidance can be at odds with their growing desire for autonomy. Engage them when making decisions about their care.

Encourage adolescents to learn about their health and connects them with trusted health care professionals, including mental health providers. Provide adolescents with information to help them manage their medical and dental care and prepare for the transition to adult services. Teach them how to advocate for themselves. Point them to resources that will help them navigate the health care system, including online resources and teen-friendly apps relating to chronic health conditions, disabilities, or mental health needs. Ensure that youths' health needs are fully assessed and refer them to those who can help. Make sure that some of these referrals accept Medicaid or have sliding fee scales. Establish follow-up procedures to see whether the youth obtained the services and how he/she is doing.

Provide opportunities for youth to offer input and build leadership skills into program design and activities. Involve adolescents in designing and reviewing program materials to confirm that language and materials work for teens. Establish a youth advisory panel to solicit input on policies or programs. Encourage older youth to be mentors to younger adolescents, with appropriate adult supervision. Reach out to youth who may not participate without encouragement. Find small ways for teens who lack confidence to get involved.

Join with others in your community to improve and coordinate service delivery. Collaborate with providers, health professionals, education and community leaders, and others to coordinate the provision of services to adolescents, particularly for those involved in multiple systems of care, such as child welfare, juvenile justice, special education and behavioral health services. Where possible, try to deliver services in places where young people are, such as schools, malls, home, after-school or summer programs, or faith-based organizations' meeting places. Catalogue existing services and programs in the community and address gaps by expanding the reach of current programs or assisting in implementing new ones.

Stay abreast of the latest research and implement best practices. Contact national resource and technical assistance centers for information and training. Learn about the latest research and best practices – including youth engagement and positive youth development – and train staff to provide and rigorously evaluate developmentally-appropriate services. Implement multi-pronged strategies to support youth in overcoming trauma and special challenges. Phase out programs that research has shown do not work.

FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG



➔ Roles for Parents, Grandparents, Families, and Caregivers

Parents, grandparents, other family members, and guardians may not know how best to promote the health of the adolescents in their care. However, although parents may sometimes feel irrelevant in the lives of their older children,⁴⁰⁻⁴² adolescents who report they have parental oversight, connectedness, communication, and/or support are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.^{43,44}

Ensure your adolescent receives health and dental care, including mental and behavioral health services as needed. Make sure adolescents receive recommended preventive health care, including vaccinations and dental care, as well as care when they are sick. Be on the lookout for warning signs such as missing school, dropping out of extracurricular activities, abnormal weight loss, persistent sadness or illegal drug use.

Start and keep the conversations going. Talk to your teen about health and developmental changes that occur during adolescence and into young adulthood. Keep lines of communication open, set boundaries, and monitor behavior while providing your teen with increasing autonomy. Encourage adolescents and celebrate their efforts and accomplishments. Share your family's values with adolescents and let them know you will support them if they need to make difficult decisions (e.g., "You can always call or text us if you need help"). Role play with your adolescent to practice handling difficult situations. Be a good listener and support positive behaviors that reduce risks.

Provide opportunities to learn basic life skills. Give adolescents plenty of opportunities to learn how to do the laundry, empty trash and change a light bulb. Gradually allow them the chance to manage their homework themselves. Show them how to handle finances, and discuss what things cost and how your family handles decisions about money. Encourage working or volunteering to gain experience.

Learn about adolescent development. Talk to your child's health professional about the expected developmental, psychological, emotional, and physical changes of adolescence so that you can adjust your expectations. Check out online resources such as those available on OAH's website: www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG, talk to other parents, or attend classes for more information.



FIND additional resources on the TAG website. www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG

Be a good role model. Model healthy behavior and habits (including wearing a seat belt, driving safely, exercising regularly, healthy cooking and eating, limiting use of technology, not smoking, using alcohol in moderation (if at all) and not drinking and driving). Develop techniques to manage the stress in your life and talk about them with your adolescent.

Encourage exercise, sleep, and healthy eating. Encourage youth to be and stay active through at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day.⁴⁵ Remind the adolescents in your life to limit the use of electronics and get enough sleep. Prepare healthy food and snacks and limit junk food. When possible, avoid keeping unhealthy, highly-processed food in the home.

Prepare adolescents for managing their health as they move towards adulthood. Teach your adolescents how to use the health care system, how to fill out the forms at medical offices, how to make appointments, and how to get referrals (if needed), and where to get information online that can be trusted.

Make time for the adolescents in your life. Be available to talk and spend time with your teen. This can happen at unexpected times such as during a car ride, while washing the dishes or when watching something on TV. Listen and let them sort out how to make good decisions as they manage peer pressure and conflict. Teach them about online privacy. Help them be connected at school and in your community. Support adolescents in building healthy relationships with peers and trusted adults in the family and community.⁴⁶ Get to know their friends and their friends' parents.



➔ Things Teens Can Do to Be Healthier

Being an adolescent is not always easy. While this period of life can be filled with fun, family, friends, and new adventures, sometimes the road to adulthood can be rocky. Some things you'll encounter may feel outside your control, but there's a lot you can do to support your health and happiness.

Go to the doctor and the dentist regularly. Medical experts recommend that teens get regular medical screenings, check-ups, and dental care. Making sure you visit your health care provider on a regular basis is part of being responsible for your health, whether you are living with your parents or are away at school. Be sure to learn about what immunizations you need and keep those up-to-date. Keep a record of your immunizations and be aware of your allergies to food or medications.

Learn how to use the health care system. Ask your parents, grandparents, doctor, school nurse, or another trustworthy adult to explain how to find doctors, make medical and dental appointments, read and understand billing statements and explanations of benefits, and complete forms. Ask them for resources you can trust to learn more about your health and preventing illness. If you're away at college, make use of the college health services offered on campus.

Make healthy habits a priority. Exercise regularly and eat nutritious food. Being active physically can boost your positive mental state and give you more energy for school and other activities. Make time for sleep and keep a regular sleep schedule. Turn off your electronics an hour before going to bed, go to bed earlier than you think you need to and take naps if you need to catch up on sleep.

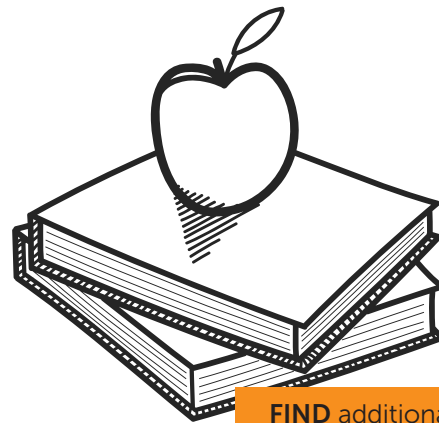
Get involved. Join clubs, play on sports teams, sing in the choir, take an art or dance class, learn a skill, or get a volunteer or paid part-time job. If you're a member of a religious community, get involved with activities offered by your synagogue, church, mosque or other place of worship. Find something you enjoy doing and pursue it. Being involved in these types of activities is good for your mood and your health!

Find a trusted mentor, guide, or advisor. In addition to your parents and relatives, other supportive adults can offer helpful guidance and advice on school, work and social life. Ask your school guidance counselor about mentoring programs that are available in your community.

Be there for others. Volunteer with local community organizations such as soup kitchens, or help out at a local child care center or retirement home. Be a good role model for your friends and peers. Consider becoming a peer counselor. You can make a difference in your own life, the lives of your friends and peers, and your school or community.

Make good choices. No one can make healthy choices for you. So, take care of yourself, and do things to make you happier and healthier. Don't rush into serious relationships before you're ready. Focus on developing your interests and hobbies and learning about future careers. Avoid illegal substance use (that includes drugs, alcohol and tobacco products if you're under 18), do not text while driving or drive while impaired by drugs or alcohol. Don't get in a car with someone who has been drinking or using drugs; find a safer way to get home.

Maintain positive relationships. Hang out with friends who are supportive of healthy choices and make you feel good about yourself. Spend time with your parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members to build strong relationships with them. Be respectful to others, even when you disagree.



FIND additional resources on the TAG website.
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG



JOIN THE **TAG** TEAM



The 42 million adolescents living in the United States today present 42 million opportunities to improve the health and development of a young person, not only today but into the future.

Information and materials produced by Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow can be used by everyone who cares about adolescents and their health. Although they may not say so, adolescents need you to get involved.

TAG identifies concrete, viable actions steps we can take individually and collectively to improve adolescent health outcomes in the United States. Everyone has a role to play. Adolescents' health is not just in the hands of the health care providers, schools, or service agencies. The responsibility rests with all of us.

For more information and resources go to the TAG website at:

www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG

You will find:

- Resources to help you implement the roles spelled out in this Playbook
- Current adolescent health data
- Links to health and social services by zip code and national hotlines
- Free materials you can download and share with friends and colleagues
- Information about TAG you can post on your organization's website
- Information to share in newsletters
- Tips on how to follow TAG via social media using #TAG42mil
- Sample tweets about adolescent health you can share with your colleagues or with teens
- Links to more information



About the Office of Adolescent Health

The HHS Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of adolescents to enable them to become healthy, productive adults. First funded in 2010, OAH supports and evaluates evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) programs and implements the Pregnancy Assistance Fund; coordinates HHS efforts related to adolescent health promotion and disease prevention; and communicates adolescent health information to health professionals and groups that serve youth, parents, grantees, and the general public. OAH facilitates the Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow effort.

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Find the references for the TAG Playbook online at www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/TAG/references





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