

**Message from**

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**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**on the occasion of**

**WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY**

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This year, World Mental Health Day focuses on “Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World”. The campaign aims to bring attention to the issues adolescents and young adults are facing in our world today and to begin a conversation around what they need in order to grow up healthy, happy and resilient. At the same time, it highlights action that key audiences – including parents, teachers, counsellors and governments – can take to help young people build mental resilience from an early age in order to cope with the challenges of today’s world.

Adolescence and the early years of adulthood can be exciting times for many but also times of great change and of stress and apprehension. In some cases, if not recognized and managed, these feelings can lead to mental illness. Also, adolescents and young adults today are growing up in a world where there is excessive use of online technologies, which undoubtedly bring many benefits but also causes additional pressures. Being connected to the Internet exposes many young people to violent video games, cyber bullying and cyber crimes.

In WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region, a significant proportion of people under 30 years of age live in areas affected by humanitarian emergencies such as conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics – at present, around two thirds of our countries are affected by such emergencies. Living in such situations makes adolescents and young adults particularly vulnerable to mental distress and illness, and increases suicide and substance use rates, which are on the rise.

Half of all mental disorders begin by the age of 14, but most cases go undetected and untreated. At any given time, about 1 person in every 10 is suffering from mental, neurological and substance use disorders, peaking in early adulthood (20-30 years of age). Depression is the third leading cause of disease among adolescents. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds. Use of illicit drugs among adolescents is a major issue in many countries and can lead to risky behaviours such as dangerous driving. Eating disorders are also of concern.

It is crucial to recognize the signs and symptoms early on in life, and provide the needed support, to prevent and reduce the progress of mental illness and improve people's mental and physical health, community participation and socioeconomic outcomes well into the future. We must all work together to help build mental resilience from an early age among young people and prevent mental distress and illness among these groups, as well as helping them manage and recover from mental illness. There is growing evidence that promoting and protecting adolescent health brings benefits not just to adolescents' health in both the short and the long term, but also to economies and society, as healthy young adults are able to make greater contributions to the workforce, their families and communities, and society as a whole.

So begin with prevention. The first step is to understand and be aware of the early warning signs and symptoms of mental illness. Here's what key audiences should do. Parents and teachers can help build the life skills of children and adolescents to help them cope with everyday challenges at home and at school. Psychosocial support can be provided in schools and other community settings, and training for health workers to enable them to detect and manage mental health disorders should be improved and expanded. Investment by governments and the involvement of the social, health and education sectors in comprehensive, integrated, evidence-based programmes for the mental health of young people is essential. This investment should be linked to programmes to raise awareness among adolescents and young adults of ways to look after their mental health and to help peers, parents and teachers know how to support their friends, children and students.

On this World Mental Health Day, I call on everyone – parents, teachers, counsellors and governments – to speak out about the needs of our young people, and to fight for their rights, to give them the best chance at growing up healthy, happy and resilient.

Join the #worldmentalhealthday conversation today.