

National Academies Release Report on Healthy Behavioral Development in Children and Youth

September 25, 2019

The National Academies of
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE



A new report by the National Academy of Sciences, penned by psychological scientists and other experts, calls for broad-based efforts by the US government to improve the mental health of children.

The Academies report, titled “Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth,” summarizes a decade of research on how mental, emotional, and behavioral developmental factors affect young people, and how healthy development of young people can be promoted. The report discusses an increase in suicide, depression, and self-harm among young people, ultimately concluding that the US has not used its knowledge on the issue of mental health to its advantage. Through direct care to young people, improving the lives and mental health of parents, and an increased effort to support communities, improvements can be made to the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children.

The report was overseen by a committee including APS Fellows Frances Champagne (University of Texas at Austin), Ricardo Muñoz (Palo Alto University), and W. Thomas Boyce (University of California San Francisco), among other psychological scientists and behavioral science experts. The report highlights how children’s mental health can depend on the family and community around them, and stresses that efforts should be made to improve young people’s surroundings. The report suggests

that stakeholders should design strategies to support mental health of parents and caregivers and develop programs to improve school settings as well as primary care settings. The report also suggests preventing the risk for disorders through the primary health care settings by promoting healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development. This can take the form of multidisciplinary care where nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, and others collaborate with physicians to provide the care required in a single setting.

The report further recommends that:

1. Federal agencies should lead and collaborate with agencies at the state and local levels, as well as private partners, including national and local foundations and the business community, in coordinating a highly visible national effort to make the promotion of healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development a national priority, such as by designating a Decade of Children and Youth.
2. Relevant federal agencies should use their program creation, regulatory, and other policy capabilities to promote healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development and mitigate risks to health.
3. Relevant federal agencies should support rapid progress in the development and dissemination of effective mental, emotional, and behavioral interventions for delivery to large populations by providing funding and other resources.

[Click here to read the highlights from the report](#), which includes more information about recommendations and suggested strategies.

[To learn more about the project, and to download the full report, and view the webinar, please visit the Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth page of the National Academies website](#)
