

Response to the  
U.S. Surgeon General's  
Advisory on  
**Protecting Youth  
Mental Health**



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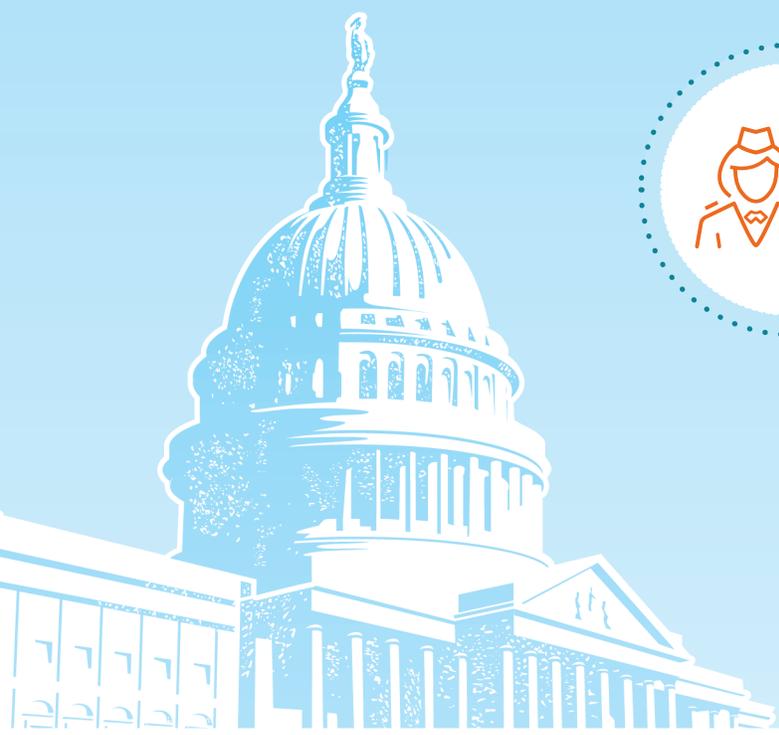
## Purpose

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The Surgeon General released an [advisory statement](#) in November 2021 related to protecting youth mental health issues exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Magellan Federal directly supports the mental health and resiliency of military youth and families, serving **over 4.5 million service members and families a year**.

This paper will outline the Surgeon General's risk factors and recommendations. Building upon that guidance, Magellan Federal offers best practices for professionals specializing in child and youth behavioral issues as well as in adult issues to foster the wellbeing of our military families.



Magellan Federal serves

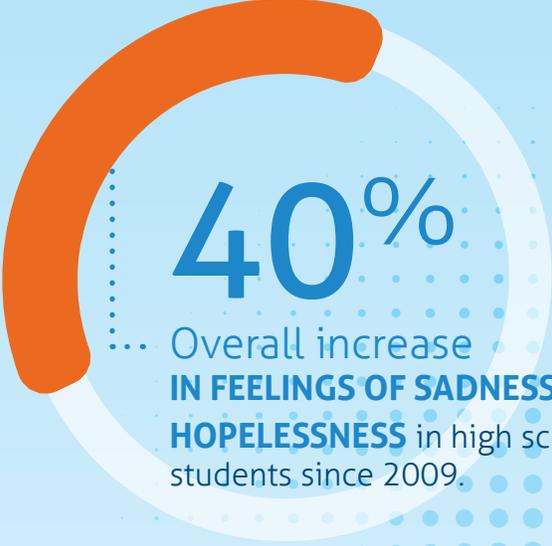
**4.5 Million+**  
**SERVICE MEMBERS**  
**& FAMILIES** a year

## Introduction and Background

Recent national surveys of young people have shown alarming increases in the prevalence of certain mental health challenges—in 2019 and before the pandemic, **one in three high school students and half of female students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an overall increase of 40% since 2009.**

Mental health is shaped by many factors, from our biology (genes, brain chemistry, etc.) to our relationships with family and friends, the community conditions one lives in, and larger social policies. In addition to these influences, today's youth are inundated with an enormous number of messages through multiple social media platforms that can erode youth's overall sense of self-worth, identity, and hope. A study published by the National Institute of Health (NIH) on Pediatric Child Health, stated "the influence on medial of the psychosocial development of children is profound" (The National Child Trauma Stress Network, 2020).

Since 2019, children have faced unprecedented amount of societal and environmental issues that few generations before having faced. Such complexities include social isolation and disruption in the educational setting due to the pandemic, income inequality, racial injustice, social upheaval, the opioid epidemic, gun violence, and concerns around global climate change. Youth are experiencing these additional worries during stages of adolescence that are traditionally known to be challenging due to reduced or undeveloped coping mechanisms.



40%

Overall increase  
**IN FEELINGS OF SADNESS AND  
HOPELESSNESS** in high school  
students since 2009.

## Surgeon General's Risk Factors

The Surgeon General's Advisory outlines a series of risk factors that have arisen due to the pandemic that are potential catalysts to youth mental health issues.



### Risk factors contributing to youth mental health symptoms during the pandemic

Having **mental health challenges** before the pandemic



Living in an urban area or an **area with more severe COVID-19 outbreaks**



Having parents or caregivers who were **frontline workers**



Having parents or caregivers at elevated risk of **burnout** (for example, due to parenting demands)



Being **worried about COVID-19**



Experiencing **trauma**, such as losing a family member or caregiver to COVID-19



Experiencing **disruptions in routine**, such as not seeing friends or going to school in person



Experiencing more **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** such as abuse, neglect, community violence, and discrimination



Experiencing more **financial instability, food shortages, or housing instability**



**GROUPS AT HIGHER RISK OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES DURING THE PANDEMIC:**

- ▶ Youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs), who found it especially difficult to manage disruptions to school and services such as special education, counseling, occupational, and speech therapies.
- ▶ Racial and ethnic minority youth including:

**AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE YOUTH**, many of whom faced challenges staying connected with friends and attending school due to limited internet access.

**BLACK YOUTH**, who were more likely than other youth to lose a parent or caregiver to COVID-19

**LATINO YOUTH**, who reported high rates of loneliness and poor or decreased mental health during the pandemic.

**ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN, AND PACIFIC ISLANDER YOUTH**, who reported increased stress due to COVID-19-related hate and harassment.

**LGBTQ+ YOUTH**, who lost access to school-based services and were sometimes confined to homes where they were not supported or accepted.

**LOW-INCOME YOUTH**, who faced economic, educational, and social disruptions, such as losing access to free school lunches.

**YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS**, who faced additional challenges in participating in school or accessing mental health services, such as, due to limited internet connectivity.

**YOUTH IN IMMIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS**, who faced language and technology barriers to accessing healthcare services and education.

**SPECIAL YOUTH POPULATIONS**, including youth involved with the juvenile justice, or child welfare systems, as well as runaway youth and youth experiencing homelessness.

**ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:**



**YOUTH WITH MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS.** Many young people are part of more than one at-risk group, which can put them at even higher risk of mental health challenges. For example, children with IDD who lost a parent to COVID-19, or Black children from low-income families, may require additional support to address multiple risk factors.



**DISCRIMINATION IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM.** Some groups of youth and their families, such as people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities, may be more hesitant to engage with the health care system (including mental health services) due to current and past experiences with discrimination.



**RISKS OF COVID-19 TO CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.** Children with mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, as well as schizophrenia spectrum disorders, are at elevated risk of severe COVID-19 illness.

## Summary: Surgeon General's Recommendations

The Advisory offers recommendations for supporting the mental health of children, adolescents, and young adults. While many of these recommendations apply to individuals, the reality is that people have widely varying degrees of control over their circumstances. As a result, not all recommendations will be feasible for everyone.

In the advisory, guidance is given on things that can be done on an individual, family, community, environmental, societal level that can shape the mental health of young people. This guidance promotes and support children and youths' resiliency and coping skills.

Magellan Federal has leveraged our expertise in delivering the Military & Family Life Counseling program for **10 years** to build upon the Surgeon General's recommendations by offering the below solutions to directly address the nation's youth mental health crisis.

## The Magellan Federal Solution

### OUR EXPERTISE

 **1,400**  
**COUNSELORS**

Magellan Federal provides military and family life counseling services through **1,400 counselors at 163 military installations** around the world.

 **70,000+**  
**SESSIONS**

Each month, we provide over **70,000 counseling sessions and 14,000 consultations** for individuals and families.

### KEY INSIGHT



Setting the foundations for positive mental health practices for children and youth today will help them thrive tomorrow and in the future!

## Best practices for working with children and youth



### **Promote and educate that mental health is an essential part of overall health**

**MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH** are equally important components of overall health.

**PRIORITIZING MENTAL HEALTH** in one's day to day life is like prioritizing exercise and diet to maintain your overall health and wellbeing.

#### **INCORPORATING POSITIVE HABITS**

Making sure that a person incorporates things in their lives that support good mental health is imperative. Taking walks, quiet time to reflect and recharge, mindfulness, and participating in enjoyable activities can support a person's overall mental health.

#### **BENEFITS TO GOOD MENTAL HEALTH**

Good mental health practice can reduce stress in the short and long term.

**GOOD PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN** supports and allows a child to have more energy, stay healthy, builds self-esteem and a sense of self, helps manage everyday stressors, and promotes better sleep.



#### **ENCOURAGING A HEALTHY DIET AND LIFESTYLE**

(food and physical activities) that supports one's overall health and mental health.

**BEING MINDFUL** of and developing a consistent sleep routine is extremely helpful overall. Keep bedtimes consistent, have less stimulus activities thirty to forty-five minutes before bedtime. Limit or avoid electronic use during this time as well. Use mindful activities and practice to prepare for bedtime. Reading a book, listening to an audio book, listening to music that is calming, and/or visualization practices to calm the body and mind.

## TALKING POINTS



*What every child needs for good mental health:*

<https://www.mhanational.org/what-every-child-needs-good-mental-health>

**2** *Promote and educate that mental health challenges are real, common, and treatable*

**FIRST SIGNS** of mental health issues or challenges can often present before a person turns 14 years old.

Mental health issues **ARE TREATABLE**. Many individuals with mental health challenges continue to function in their daily lives with support from a variety of resources.

There are **EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES** to prevent some mental health challenges as well as effective treatments.

**PARENTAL STRESS** is a significant predictor of child functioning during and after deployment. Practicing effective coping strategies to decrease parental stress can help support their children's overall adjustment around deployment.

**LONG-TERM STRESS** can lead to many physical and mental health issues in a person's life if it is not addressed and managed in a healthy way.

**WHEN TO GET HELP AND WHERE TO START?**

<https://www.mhanational.org/finding-help-when-get-it-and-where-go> from Mental Health America gives a briefing amount of mental health issues, breakdown of common signs of mental health concerns broken down by adult, teenagers and young children, next steps and understanding different mental health resources and providers.

**1 in 5 AMERICANS** will experience mental health illness.



**1 in 5 CHILDREN** either currently or at some point during their life, have had a serious mental health illness.

MORE THAN **50%**

Will be diagnosed **WITH A MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESS** or disorder at some point in their lifetime.

### 3 Empower youth and their families to recognize, manage, and learn from difficult emotions.

**HELPING CHILDREN RECOGNIZE** their feelings, label, and identify emotions and appropriately express and deal with their emotions at all stages of development.

**HELPING CHILD UNDERSTAND** and develop age-appropriate problem-solving skills to use independently.

**FOR YOUTH**, this includes building strong relationships with peers and supportive adults, practicing techniques to manage emotions, taking care of body and mind, being attentive to use of social media and technology, and seeking help when needed.

#### FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

- This means addressing their own mental health and substance use conditions, being positive role models for children, promoting positive relationships between children and others as well as with social media and technology, and learning to identify and address challenges early. Youth and families should know that asking for help is a sign of strength and not a weakness or flaw.
- Encourage parenting practices that teach and encourage families to reduce stress during deployment and transitions.

**DEVELOPING AND USING POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS** throughout a child's developmental stages. This resource breaks down approaches to positive parenting for adults broken down by developmental ages and stages: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/index.html>

#### FOR EVERYONE

- Understanding the signs of stress and ways to manage stress in a healthy way for children, youth, and adults.
- Understanding and using mindfulness practice that speak to the individual and provides time to reflect and self-regulate. This is not a one size fits all model! Being open to different ways to practice and incorporate mindfulness can be very helpful.
- Building resiliency skills by focusing on personal strengths, understanding your own emotional vocabulary and presentation, being open to suggestions, and encouragement to grow and evolve.
- Understanding and being mindful that military children PCS often and the impact that creates ties to your disruption of services causality. Caregivers should be keenly aware if a child is coming or going.



## **Promote and educate children to develop and practice using techniques to manage stress and other difficult emotions**

**DEVELOPING THE SKILLS** to become more emotionally intelligent. Emotional intelligence is the ability for one to recognize, understand and manage their own emotions as well as acknowledge and understand other's emotions and emotional state.

**FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**, use of handouts found in the OSD resource library <https://www.gottman.com/blog/3-dos-donts-raising-emotionally-intelligent-kids/>

Learning and using **POSITIVE PARENTING** approaches to:

- Bridge communication gaps
- Defuse power struggles
- Avoid the dangers of praise
- Enforce your message of love
- Build on strengths, not weaknesses
- Hold children accountable with their self-respect intact
- Teach children not what to think but how to think
- Win cooperation at home and at school

**DEVELOPING POSITIVE PARENT/CHILD ACTIVITIES** to reduce stress and impact behavior by using resource such as: <https://cosmickids.com/about/> which introduces mindfulness and ways to children and can develop and use this in developing their overall emotional regulation and management.

**REINFORCING POSITIVE PARENTING** approaches by using or referring to resources about children/youth and parental healthy relations from:

- [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)
- <https://www.dodea.edu/parents/index.cfm>
- <https://www.militarychild.org/>
- <https://www.nctsn.org/resources>
- [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)
- [www.tutor.com](http://www.tutor.com)
- <https://www.militarykidsconnect.org/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/index.html>

When possible, **CAREGIVERS AND PROFESSIONALS SHOULD PROVIDE GROUPS** so children feel less isolated, discuss feelings, and create connections to offset the disruptions.

**BREATHE, THINK, DO** with Sesame Street: Identifying and understand emotions and age-appropriate approaches to manage these feelings for preschoolers to first graders. <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/> provides a range or resource on numerous social emotional topics for young children Some specifically designed for the military community. A parent, caregiver and/ or professional has access to fast facts, videos, and apps that are child and parent friendly to use.

**CATCH IT, CHECK IT, AND CHANGE IT:** online resources for children, youth and parents developed by the CDC to teach healthy ways to deal with stressful situations. Check out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geT9sNLReGO>

**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS** in your life provide support, comfort, and the ability to better manage stress and challenges in a person's day to day life. Looking at and understand what a healthy relationship is very important.



5

*Promote and educate children to develop and practice using techniques to manage stress and other difficult emotions*

- ▶ **START A DISCUSSION** with children and youth around who they believe are trusted adults to talk to about problems, concerns, and/or feelings.
- ▶ **REVIEW** trusted adults who can help a child or youth outside the family including education staff, coaches, doctors, counselors, religious leaders in their lives, first responders, and community organization leaders.
- ▶ **MODEL** what a discussion around feelings or a concern may look like with a child. Practice how to effectively communicate a feeling, thought, or concern with others.



TRY AN EXERCISE

Take a minute and think of who you would talk to if you had a problem or needed to confide in. Don't say their name! Think about that person and why you feel comfortable with talking to them. Think of their gender, age, communication style, and anything else that makes you feel at ease with this person.

**After listing or talking about the individual characteristics of a person they would confide in, have the person reflect to see if there are other people in their lives that have similar characteristics.**

## Resources for Young People

If you're in crisis, get immediate help: Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, chat with trained counselors 24/7, or get help in other ways through the Lifeline. Additional resources include:

- ▶ **How Right Now (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):** Resources for coping with negative emotions and stress, talking to loved ones, and finding inspiration
- ▶ **Youth Engaged 4 Change:** Opportunities for youth to make a difference in their lives and in the world around them
- ▶ **Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth (National Academies of Medicine):** Tools for children, teens, and parents to learn how to cope with challenges
- ▶ **Mental Health Resource Center (JED Foundation):** Information about common emotional health issues and how to overcome challenges
- ▶ **Youth Wellbeing Initiatives (National Council for Mental Wellbeing):** Collection of initiatives to improve mental wellbeing in youth and young adults
- ▶ **Kids, Teens, and Young Adults (National Alliance on Mental Illness):** Resources for young people to get mental health support
- ▶ **One Mind PsyberGuide:** A guide to navigating mental health apps and digital technologies

- ▶ **FindTreatment.gov (SAMHSA):** Information on substance use and mental health treatment
- ▶ **Trevor Project:** Suicide prevention and crisis intervention resources for LGBTQ+ young people
- ▶ **AAKOMA Mental Health Resources (The AAKOMA Project):** Resources to support the mental health of youth of color and their caregivers
- ▶ **Mental Health for Immigrants (Informed Immigrant):** Tips for managing the mental health of yourself and others

## Resources for Families

- ▶ **Children's Mental Health and COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit (CDC):** Resources for supporting children's social, emotional, and mental health
- ▶ **HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics):** Parenting tips and other resources
- ▶ **What's On Your Mind? (UNICEF):** Guide for talking to children about mental health
- ▶ **Family Resource Center (Child Mind Institute):** Family resources on child mental health, including Media Guidelines for Kids of All Ages
- ▶ **Parents' Ultimate Guides (Common Sense Media):** Information about the safety of current media and technology trends and apps for your children
- ▶ **HealthCare.gov or InsureKidsNow.gov:** Information on enrolling in health insurance coverage
- ▶ **MentalHealth.gov:** What to look for, how to talk about mental health, and how to get help
- ▶ **Aging and Disability Networks (ACL):** Connect with advocacy and caregiver resources
- ▶ **NetSmartz (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children):** Online platform to teach children online

## About the Author



**PAUL TARABORELLI MSW, LICSW**, is a Child Youth Behavioral (CYB) Director on Magellan Federal's Military Family Life Counseling program. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of New England and his master's degree in social work from Boston University. He has held his independent license in Rhode Island for over 25 years and is an active member in Rhode Island's Association of Infant Mental Health (RIAIMH). He has provided clinical consultations on early childhood mental health issues, approaches to supporting children in the classroom with a range of developmental, behavioral, and medical issues for early childhood programs and working with families with children presenting with behavioral concerns. He has presented in the past on topics including guiding behaviors in a classroom setting, the development and use of a bereavement protocol and services for families, adolescent drug abuse and treatment, and child abuse and neglect.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WHITE PAPER

