

People across the country are coming together to talk about a very important topic—mental health. Raising awareness about mental health reminds us how important it is to take care of our minds and emotions, just as we do for our physical health. It's a chance to speak openly, break the stigma around mental illness, and advocate for people to get the assistance and resources they deserve.

Mental Health at Every Age

Mental health **affects how people think, feel, and manage problems**. Several things affect a person's mental health such as family, school, work, and access to healthcare. Mental health awareness is important at every stage of life.

- Teens (12–17 years old) go through tremendous changes. Pressures from social media, school, and friends can all lead to stress or anxiety.
- Young adults (18–26 years old) face new responsibilities like starting college or a new job or living away from home for the first time. These changes can contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and emotional strain.
- Adults (27–64 years old) often deal with work, family, money, and relationship stressors. This can lead to burnout and disrupt mental health and well-being.
- Older adults (65+ years) may feel lonely after retirement or after losing loved ones. This can affect mental health, as well.

A Growing Mental Health Crisis Among Teens

Mental health challenges are on the rise among adolescents in the United States. Approximately 8 million children and teens have been diagnosed with a mental illness or behavioral disorder. Data from the CDC's 2023 **Youth Risk Behavior Survey** highlights several concerning trends:

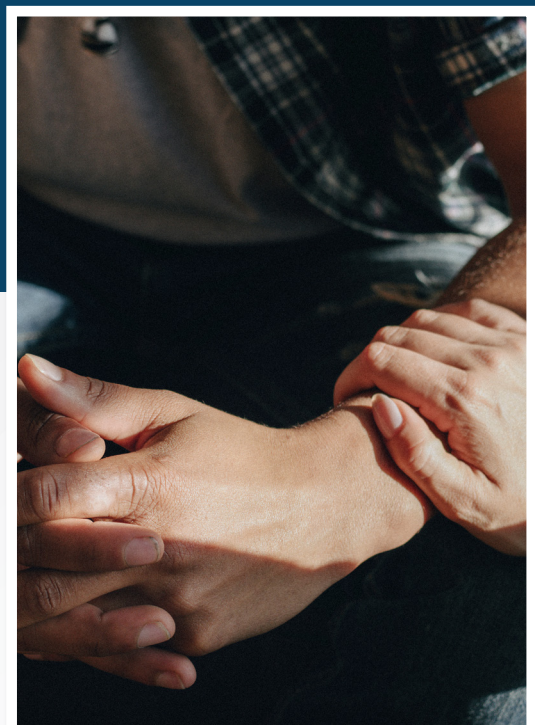
- 40% of high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless.
- Nearly 20% seriously considered attempting suicide.
- Almost 10% reported attempting suicide.

Certain populations are experiencing even greater distress. Female students and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ reported higher rates of mental health concerns compared to their peers. Additionally, students of color were more likely to experience suicidal thoughts than their White or Asian classmates. These findings underscore the urgent need for accessible, inclusive mental health support for all.

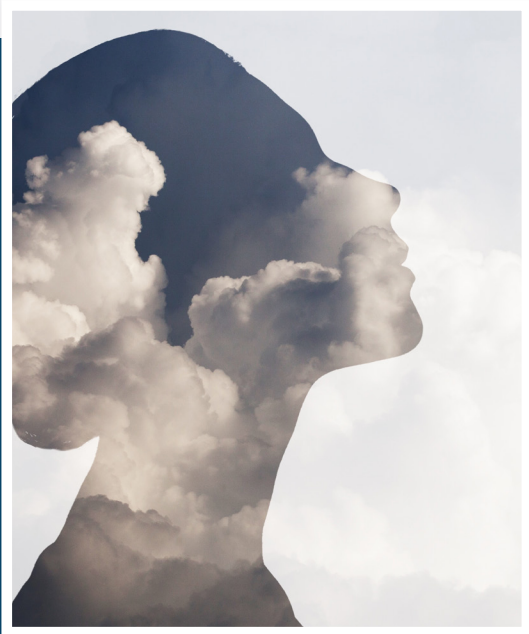
Hope Through Connection and Community

While the challenges facing today's youth are significant, there is reason for hope. Adolescents are resilient, and meaningful connections can play a powerful role in supporting their mental well-being. Strong relationships with family members, peers, and community networks are consistently linked to better emotional outcomes and greater overall resilience.

Fostering supportive environments—where individuals feel safe, heard, and accepted—can have a profound impact. Listening without judgment and showing kindness can also make a big difference. Talking about mental health doesn't make us weak—it makes us stronger. Together, we can build a world where no one struggles alone.



OXIHER HEALTH PRIORITIES: FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH



FROM XULA STUDENT Shawniece Mitchell

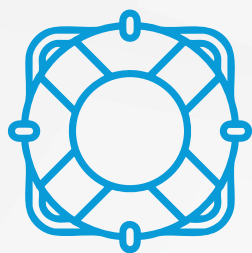
I often reflect deeply on what mental health truly means to me, as a young woman and a student at Xavier University of Louisiana. On a campus filled with so much excellence, resilience, and pride, mental health can often feel like an invisible battle, one that is fought quietly behind the glow of achievements and bright smiles.

Being at an HBCU has been a beautiful, empowering experience, but it also comes with its challenges when dealing with mental health. Vulnerability can sometimes feel like a weakness in spaces where strength is celebrated.

College has a way of bringing every struggle to the surface. The pressure to perform well academically, be socially active, and care for personal needs takes its toll. Pretending to be okay when under immense pressure does more harm than good. At Xavier, we are fortunate to have these spaces

to reach out. Students can call Xavier's Office of Counseling and Wellness at 504-520-7315 or contact the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 if they need immediate support.

Mental health is not just a personal responsibility; it's a community responsibility. It means permitting oneself to feel, hurt, and heal. It means dismantling the idea that seeking help is a weakness. It means creating a new legacy for oneself and future generations. This May—and all year long—I hope we continue to fight for a world, starting with our campuses, where mental health is seen not as an afterthought but as a vital part of who we are.



No Judgement. Just Help.

If you or someone you know is struggling, free, confidential help is available 24/7.

Call or text 988 | Chat at 988lifeline.org

TTY users can use their preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988

Employers and schools often offer mental health resources such as counseling services, wellness programs, or access to support hotlines. Reaching out to these services can provide valuable support for managing stress, emotional challenges, or mental health conditions.



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INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH EQUITY AND RESEARCH

The Ochsner-Xavier Institute for Health Equity and Research (OXIHER) regularly shines a light on some of the most critical health needs affecting the communities we serve. OXIHER works in alignment with Healthy State to develop effective strategies to address and improve overall population health.