

# Dept. of Health Services: Office of Children's Mental Health focuses on rebuilding peer connections

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Office of Children's Mental Health Director Linda Hall today announces the publication of a new fact sheet, [Rebuilding Peer Connections](#), and details what our communities, schools, parents, and policymakers can do to make a difference.

## Highlights

- For many youth, whether attending school in-person or virtually, the pandemic has eroded the positive relationships that are necessary for healthy development.
- Many young people and their families now have greater mental health needs, but fewer social connections.
- Isolation can create a vicious cycle of social anxiety and social avoidance that can persist even as normal life resumes.
- Experts and young people emphasize the need now for youth to connect through school, extracurriculars, and free time. For some, facilitated discussions or expressive art projects may be helpful for processing their pandemic experiences.
- Adolescents involved in positive youth programming report that peers and slightly older "near peers" are more effective than teachers or adult leaders at helping them make social connections and build skills.

## What We Can Do

- Parents can look for in-person or positive online opportunities for their child to

reconnect with friends and peers, even if it feels awkward at first.

- Teachers can prioritize time spent restoring peer and adult relationships as a key investment in student success.
- Teachers can also embed discussions of student experiences, coping strategies, and reflections into the classroom.
- Policymakers can fund help to reduce evictions and family mobility so that young people can remain in their neighborhoods, schools, and day cares.
- Communities can foster places and programs for youth to connect and learn life skills they can use to support one another.

See the [complete fact sheet](#).

See [previous fact sheets](#).