

Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health: Highlighting middle school mental health

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The middle school years, generally ages 10-14, are a time of profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social change. This amount of change is second only to the amount that happens in infancy.

Known as tweens (*between* childhood and teenage years), this group of children is managing increased academic responsibilities and shifting social dynamics while fluctuating hormones and identity formation are swirling internally. This often results in hallmark mood swings, according to the latest [fact sheet](#) from the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH).

The fact sheet explains that during early adolescence, the brain's frontal lobe is still developing. Tweens' cognitive maturity and self-regulation are limited, but their independence and responsibilities are increasing, making them more vulnerable to stressors and adverse events.

"Middle schoolers may have big mood swings and test parental patience, but they are also becoming critical thinkers. They tend to be curious and creative learners who care about the world around them," said OCMH Director Linda Hall. "To protect middle schoolers well-being, we need to equip them with skills that will allow them to manage stress, forge trusting relationships, and establish positive mental health habits - essentially, the foundation to thrive."

One program tailored specifically to middle school girls is featured in [Showcasing Solutions](#), a related piece from OCMH. Heart & Sole, a Girls on the Run program, aims to help tween girls become independent and critical thinkers, and to find inner

strength through physical activity. The vast majority of caregivers report that Heart & Sole helped their child gain skills to handle stress.

“Fun, unique, and empowering initiatives like this are what kids need. Tweens face a lot of stress, but we can provide healthy outlets that protect their mental health. We need to focus on supporting middle school youth, and be careful not to overlook this pivotal stage,” said Hall.

The fact sheet highlights easy actions that can help kids, especially those entering early adolescence, including building a rich emotional vocabulary to name feelings; validating kids’ feelings no matter the feeling; and prioritizing in-person time to connect with friends and family.

The fact sheet includes additional recommendations for how parents, policymakers, schools, providers, and communities can support children in middle school.

See the full [OCMH Fact Sheet: Middle School Mental Health](#)

See all [OCMH Fact Sheets](#)

See the [OCMH Showcasing Solutions: Heart & Sole](#)

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