

RM 3–MH: Life Experiences Leading to Mental Health Issues

The following lists identify factors or situations that students usually do not have control over and situations that students usually have some control over. Check student responses against the lists provided below.

Situations Students Usually Do Not Have Control Over

Life experiences that may contribute to mental health issues that teenagers usually do not have control over could include the following:

- Inheriting genetic causes. (People with a history of mental health problems in their family may be more likely to develop problems themselves.)
- Experiencing biochemical causes. (An imbalance of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, is known to affect the processing of thoughts and emotions.)
- Undergoing hormonal changes (that are a natural part of puberty and life transition)
- Having a low income or being homeless
- Living with a family member who has a mental illness or an addiction
- Experiencing violence, abuse, or other trauma
- Living in an environment that is chaotic, unsafe, or dangerous (e.g., living in a violent home, or living in a house with shedding asbestos, peeling lead paint, or toxic drinking water, living in a community where drug use or gang violence is widespread)
- Experiencing chronic illnesses (whether born with or developed)
- Growing up in a homeland of unrest (e.g., witnessing or experiencing war, violence, or fear)
- Experiencing racism or other forms of prejudice (e.g., because of sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, class, body type)
- Dealing with the death of a family member or a close friend
- Experiencing a change in parental relationships (e.g., separation, divorce)
- Encountering a change in living environments (e.g., moving from one home to another due to a change in parental relationship, foster home, job transition of a parent or guardian)

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Situations Students Usually Have Some Control Over

Life experiences that may contribute to mental health issues that teenagers usually have some control over could include the following:

- Using or abusing substances. (Alcohol and some drugs are known to have depressive effects or to increase anxiety. Some drugs such as crystal meth can cause symptoms that resemble those of schizophrenia. The negative social and personal consequences of substance abuse can also be a contributing factor to depression.)
- Using violence to solve problems (resulting in problems at home and/or at school and involvement in the justice system)
- Under-eating or overeating. (Restricting food intake below what the body needs or eating beyond comfort to cope with problems or difficult feelings can cause additional mental and physical health problems.)
- Being in an unhealthy relationship. (The long-term toll of staying in an unhealthy relationship or peer group is greater than the short-term turmoil and stress involved in leaving it.)
- Overdoing it by taking on too many things at one time to the point that it causes additional stress (e.g., working too much while going to school, being involved in too many activities)
- Not sleeping enough for what the body needs. (On its own, sleep deprivation will not cause a mental health problem, but when combined with other factors, including stress, insufficient sleep puts people at risk of poor health and a decreased coping capacity.)