



MEANINGFUL AND SYSTEMIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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20 May 2025 | Brussels

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE



- 01 Adolescence: long developmental stage from 10 to 24
- 02 Window of acceleration and opportunity (and also risk)
- 03 The Lancet Commission on adolescent health and wellbeing: the “triple dividend”
- 04 CRC comment #20 child rights with specific focus on adolescents

THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

A SECOND WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

EARLY ADOLESCENCE IS
**A TIME OF RAPID
LEARNING AND
BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

THESE INCLUDE
INCREASES IN
SENSATION-SEEKING,
MOTIVATION FOR SOCIAL
RELATIONS AND SENSITIVITY TO
SOCIAL EVALUATION.

A PERIOD OF
**VULNERABILITY
AND OPPORTUNITY**

PUBERTY INITIATES INTENSE
LEARNING & BRAIN
DEVELOPMENT, WHICH LEAD TO
STRUCTURAL REMODELING AND
NEURAL RE-CONFIGURATION OF
KEY BRAIN SYSTEMS. IT'S A
CRUCIAL TIME TO INVEST IN
ADOLESCENTS.



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"THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN:
A SECOND WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY"

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ADOLESCENT BRAINS

ARE SENSITIVE TO STRESSORS

BIOLOGICAL

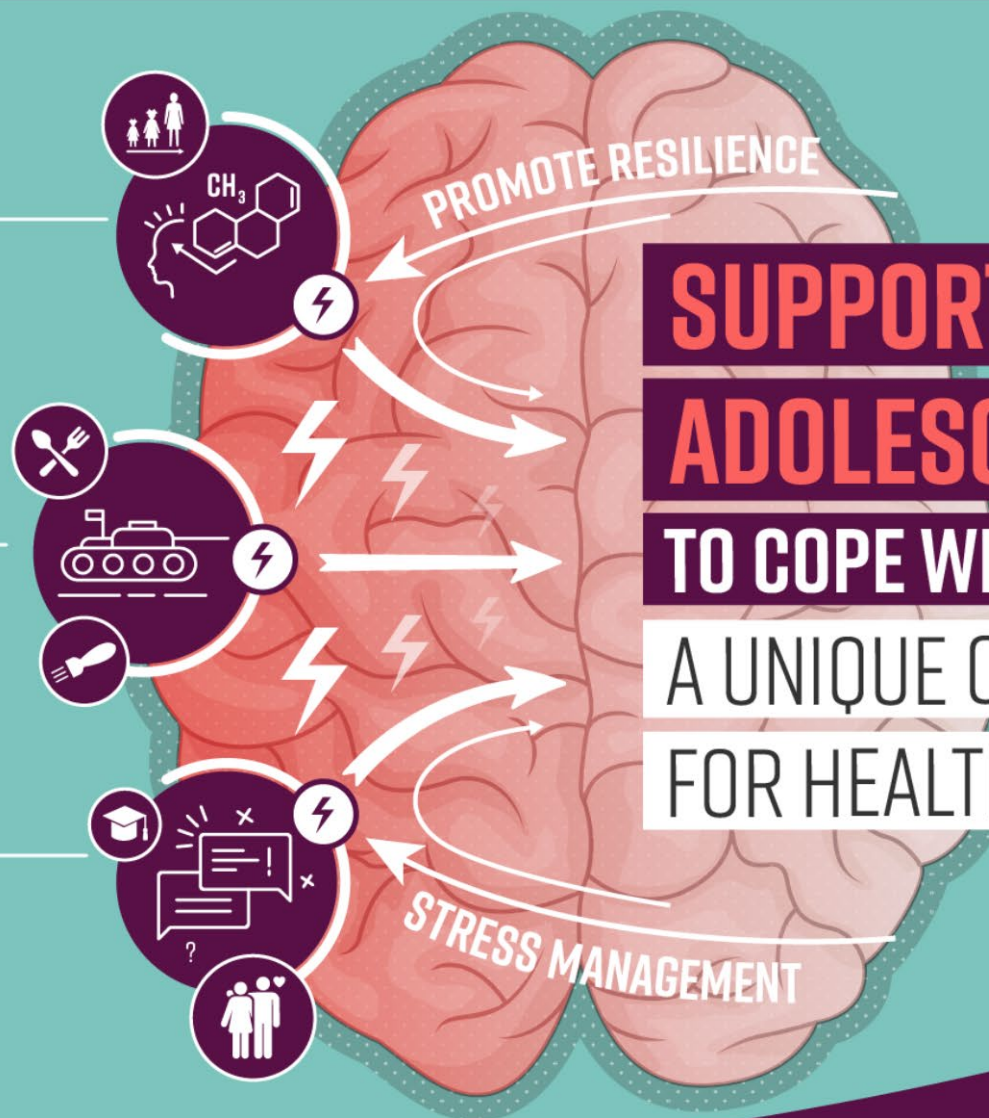
CHANGES IN HORMONE LEVELS
AFFECT DEVELOPMENT OF
NEUROBIOLOGICAL CIRCUITS.

POPULATION

MASS EVENTS - WAR AND
DISASTER - CAN HAVE LONGER
LASTING NEGATIVE IMPACTS.

SOCIAL

ADOLESCENTS NEED A
SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT TO
DEVELOP THEIR SOCIAL IDENTITY
AND CONNECT TO PEERS.



SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS TO COPE WITH STRESS

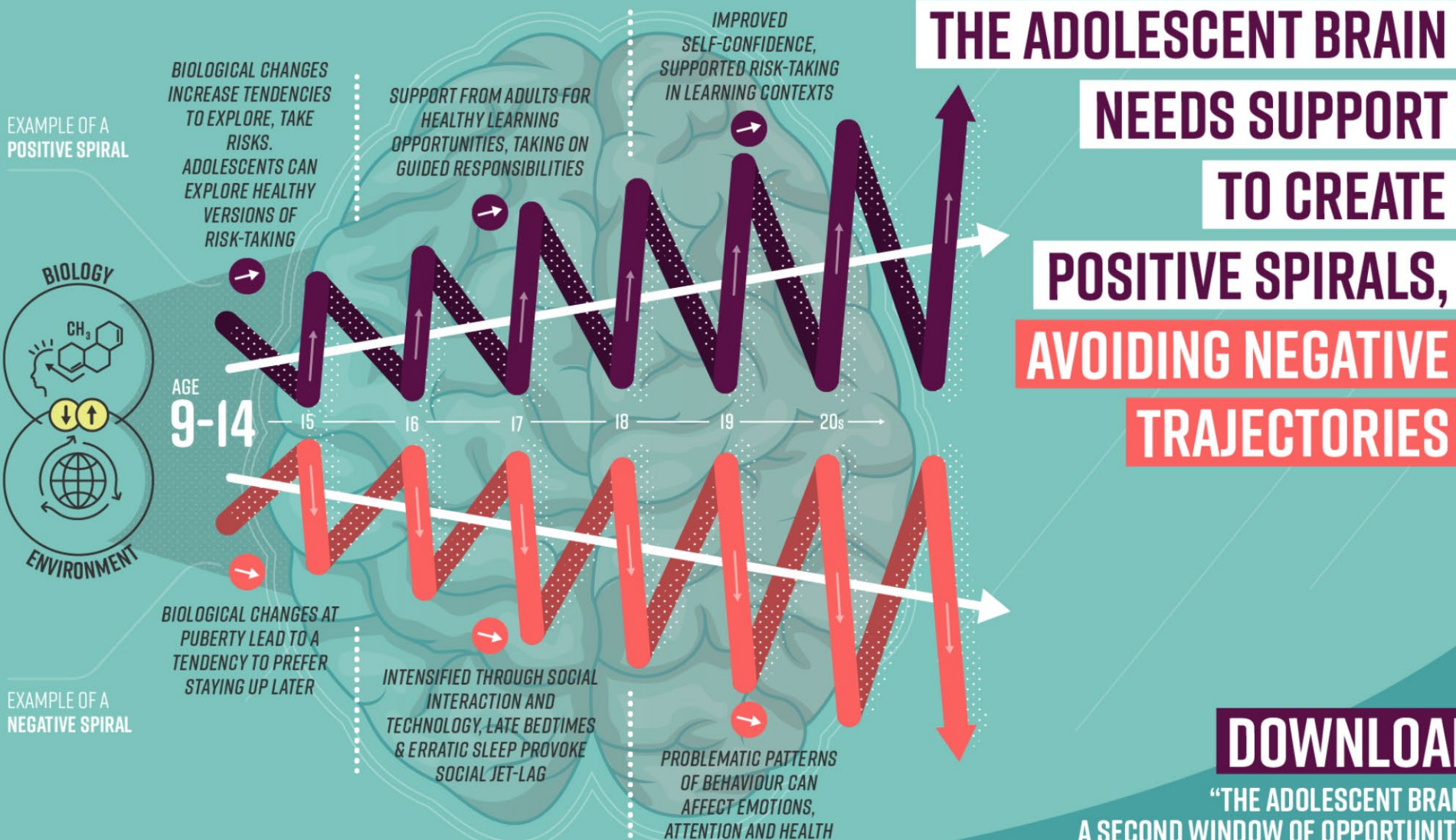
A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY
FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPIRALS

DURING ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



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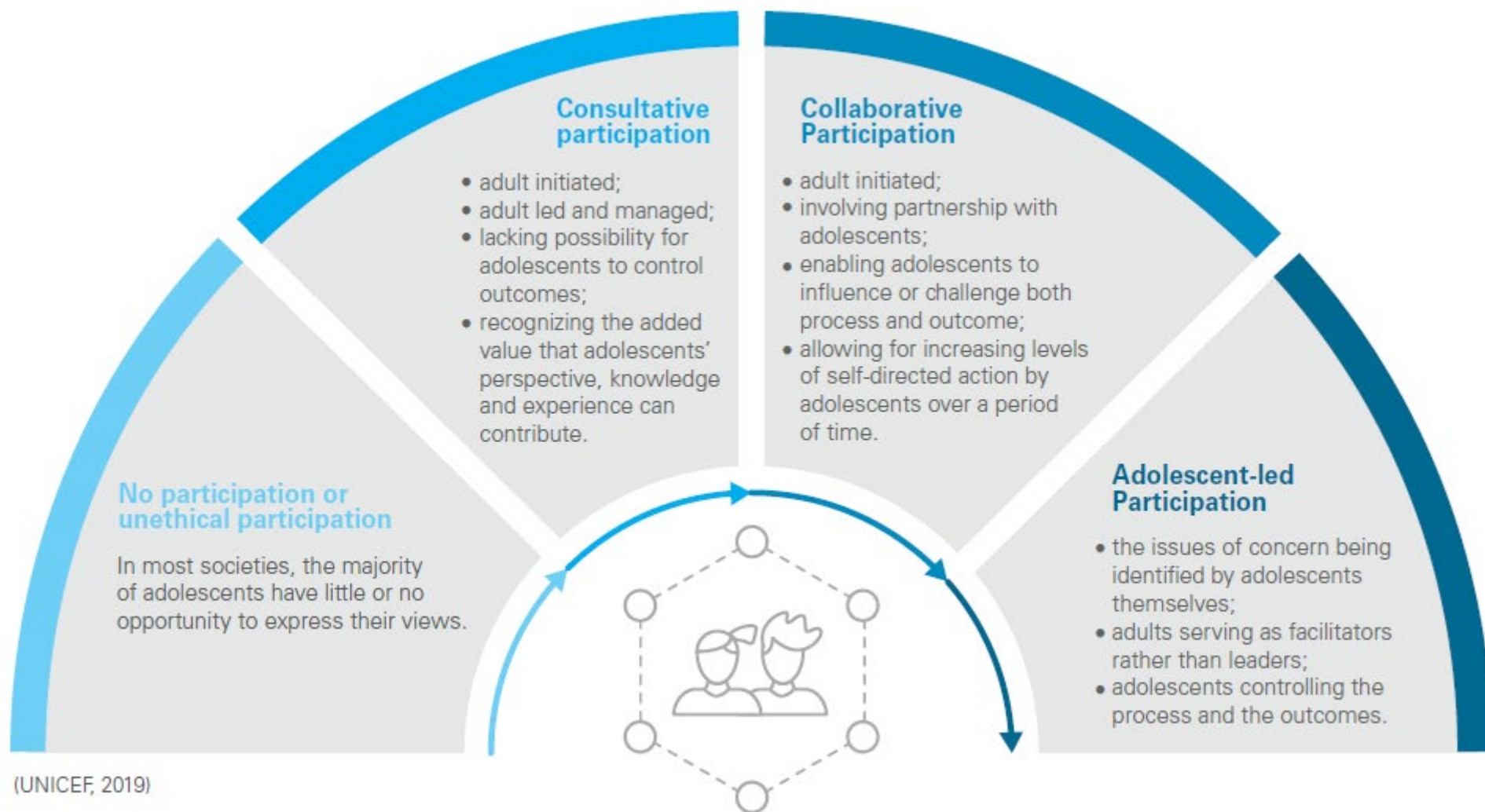
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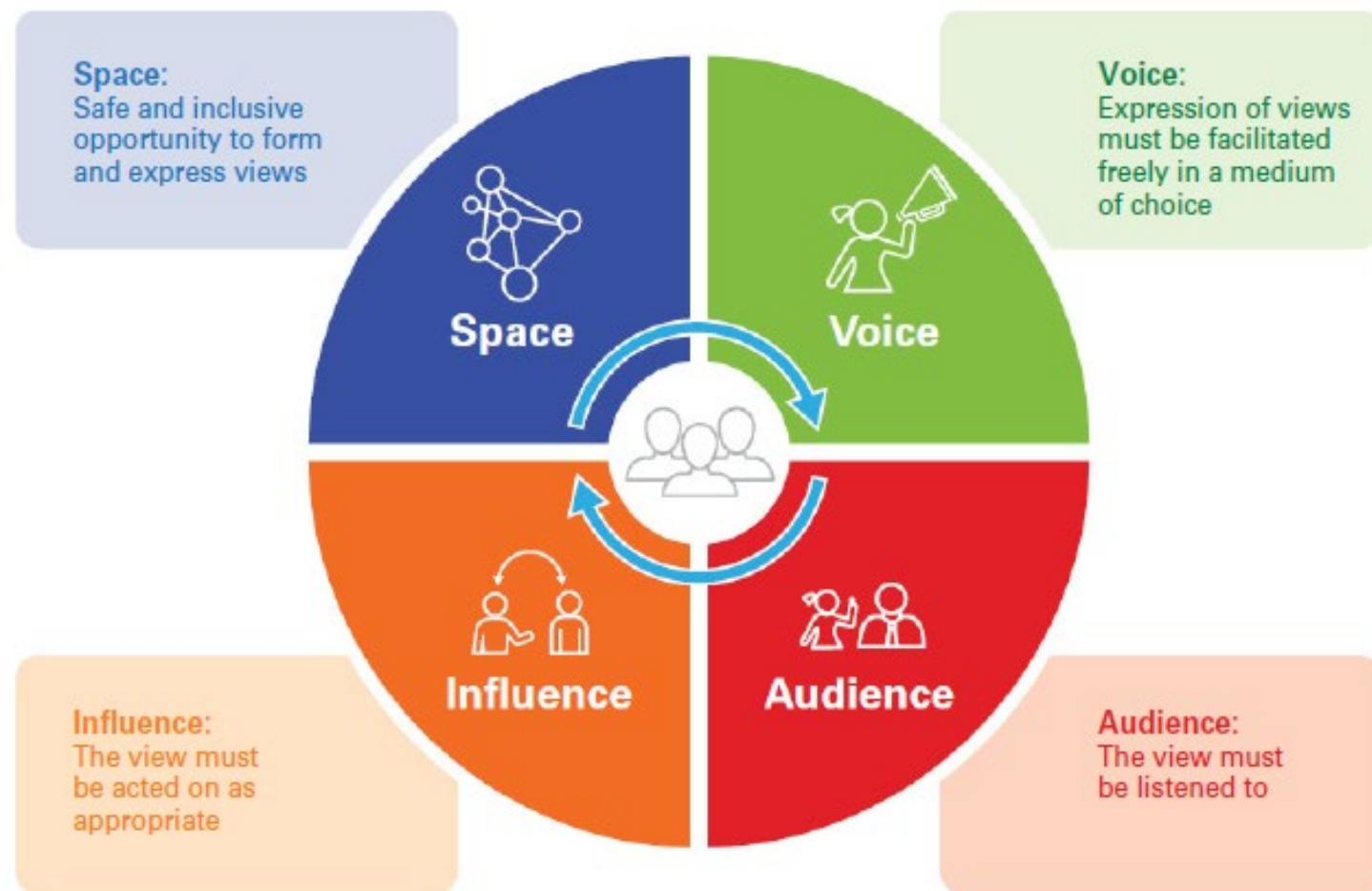
AUTONOMY AND PARTICIPATION

- Vulnerabilities in early years **get worse** in adolescence: Lower services – less adapted to their needs less institutional supports, less care of parents – **autonomy** factor
- Working with young people is not a “nice to have”
 - Young people – **users** of programmes and services – is key to making sure they use them
 - Quality services, Accountability, Fundamental to programme design
 - But can be leveraged – young people become **agents** – can contribute to their results at own level, and community-level

QUICK OVERVIEW: MODES OF PARTICIPATION



WHAT CONSTITUTES MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION ?



FIVE MAIN STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ADVOCATE FOR
LAWS, POLICIES
PRACTICES AND
BUDGETS

ENHANCE
POSITIVE
SOCIAL
NORMS AND
ATTITUDES

BUILD THE
AWARENESS,
SKILLS
CAPACITIES
OF ADULTS

BUILD THE
AWARENESS,
SKILLS
CAPACITIES OF
ADOLESCENTS

CREATE AND
SUSTAIN
PLATFORMS FOR
ADOLESCENT
PARTICIPATION
AND CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT

9 BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Transparent and Informative

- To have a clear purpose
- Understanding the impact on decision making
- Understanding roles and responsibilities clearly
- Being in agreement with goals and targets associated



Voluntary

- Being able to provide Informed consent in involvement
- Awareness and ability to withdraw at any time
- Other commitments are respected and accommodated



Respectful

- Building self-esteem and confidence to have valid experience and views to contribute
- Representation process based on democratic principles, avoiding discrimination
- Support from the front line workers (FLWs) to gain respect among other key duty bearers



Adolescent-Friendly

- Time, resources and support to ensure quality participation
- Methods of involvement developed in partnership with adolescents
- Ensuring adolescent-friendly approaches by the adults
- Meeting locations are friendly and accessible for all (adolescents with disabilities and minority groups as well)



Relevant

- Relevant activities to add experience, knowledge and abilities
- Approaches and methods built on local knowledge and practices
- Involvement in ways, levels and pace appropriate to capabilities and interests



Inclusive

- No discrimination based on any factor
- Flexible participation to serve needs, expectations and situations of different groups
- Abilities of adolescents taken into account vis-à-vis their existing patterns of discrimination



Supported by Training for Adults

All FLWs, NGO partners and staff are:

- Sensitized to participation
- Provided with appropriate tools and training
- Able to express and address grievances in a constructive way

Technical skills or expertise is built up through a staff development and practice exchange



Safe and Sensitive to Risk

- Well planned protection rights
- Awareness on right to be safe and help centres
- Delegation of skilled, knowledgeable staff to address child protection issues
- Minimization of risks and abuse prevention
- Child protection strategy specific to each process
- Well communicated strategy for NGOs/FLWs
- Child protection procedures to recognize the risks and barriers of specific groups
- Maintaining confidentiality and seeking consent in case of information disclosure
- Confidential complaint procedure
- Multi-lingual facility of information on procedures
- Consent on publicity and promotion is necessary



Accountable

- Early involvement
- Accountable staff and partners
- Support is provided in follow-up and evaluation process
- Support is provided to share experiences with peer groups, local communities and other organizations
- Rapid and clear feedback on involvement, impact, outcomes and next steps
- Feedback is provided
- Satisfaction level is evaluated and enhanced
- Strategy improvement and rectification of mistakes



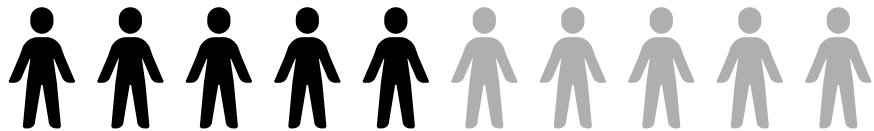
POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS

- Youth & **HIV** & MHPSS
- Youth & **nutrition/healthy lifestyles** & MHPSS
- Youth **participation/advocacy** on MHPSS topics and as an MHPSS intervention
- Youth & **climate advocacy** & MHPSS
- Youth & **peer violence** & MHPSS
- **Digital tools**
- Others?



WHY DIGITAL MH SOLUTIONS - YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Internet/Social Media



Health worker/counselor



In a [U-Report](#) poll of 7,000 young people in Europe, 5 in 10 persons would seek MH self-care tips on the internet/social media, while less than 1 in 10 would go to a health worker/counselor (July, 2023).

Online questionnaire

While young people prioritize privacy, accuracy of information, and online platform availability for E-MH, there is reluctance towards mandatory parental consent for using such services.



8 out of 14

Prefer to speak about their mental health issues online



12 out of 14

E-MH is considered less stigmatizing because it allows for anonymity.



10 out of 14

Feel that mandatory parental consent could be an **obstacle** in using E-MH.

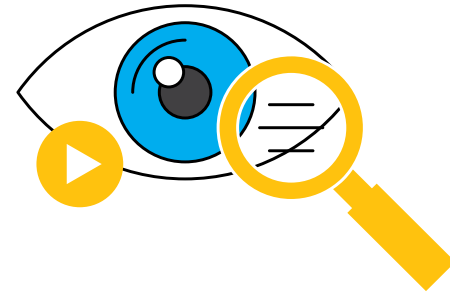


6 out of 14

Parental consent are not be necessary for teenagers to use EMH.

WHAT IS NEEDED ?

- Capacity-building (youth + adults)
- Resources and structural support to empower young people as equal partners
- Established mechanisms beyond ad-hoc events



SOME KEY REFERENCES

- [Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement](#)
- [Global Adolescents Engagement Framework](#)
- [Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A Protocol for Practitioners](#)
- [Tip Sheets for Adolescent and Youth Participation](#)
- [Helping Adolescents Thrive Facilitators Guide](#)
- [Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit](#)
- [Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents](#)