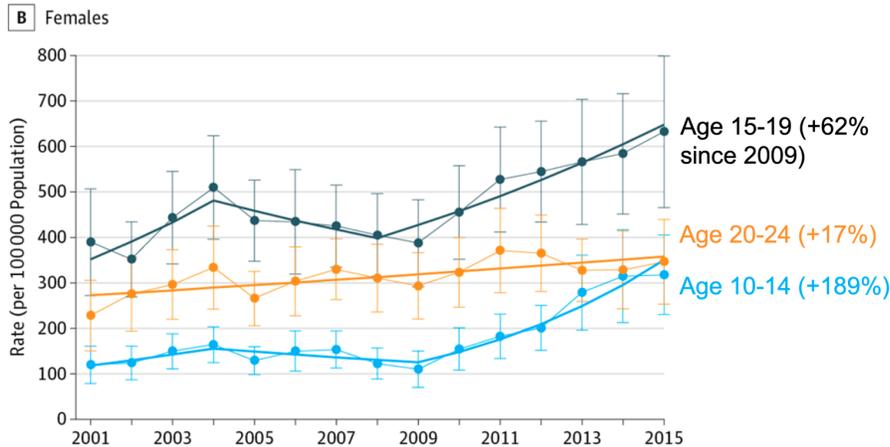


# What Elementary Schools Can Do to Reduce Anxiety/Depression Later On

From Jonathan Haidt, co-author of *The Coddling of the American Mind*, and father of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader and 7<sup>th</sup> grader. 6/23/19

1) **There is a very large increase in rates of teen anxiety and depression** for kids born after 1995 (Gen Z). The problem is larger for girls than boys. See ch. 7 of *The Coddling*, and see reviews of the literature at <https://www.thecoddling.com/better-mental-health>

## Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls



2) **The evidence suggests three major causes:**

- A) The **loss of most unsupervised free play time**, beginning in the 1990s
- B) Overly **protective modes of parenting/training**. The best way to become confident and competent is to do something on your own, but we increasingly treat kids as though they are incompetent and can't be trusted to do things on their own.
- C) Too-early **entrance into social media**, where students train each other to be fearful, conformist, and sometimes cruel in order to avoid being targeted themselves.

3) **What can an elementary school do to produce stronger graduates**, less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, more likely to become independent and resilient middle-schoolers?

- A) Encourage all teachers and parents to *visit LetGrow.org*, and sign up for the mailing list.
- B) Do the "let grow" project: each month, kids suggest to their parents one new thing they can do for themselves. They do it, and write about it.
- C) *More free play time*, with less direct supervision. (Have an adult nearby, but not so present that she will get involved in disputes). This could mean more recess time, or encouragement for kids to play on the playground before or after school.
- D) Help parents solve the "social coordination problem" of social media. Principals should send a clear message to all parents urging them to *not let kids have any social media accounts until high school*. Speak clearly about the damage it does to kids before high school.
- E) Give *more independence, earlier*: encourage walking to and from school, walking unsupervised between classes earlier, let kids who have proven themselves responsible have the privilege of going out to lunch in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, if there are restaurants nearby...
- F) *Discourage the language of "safety"* for anything beyond physical safety. Emphasize that kids are "antifragile" instead: they need challenges, conflicts, and even (brief) stressors to grow strong.

For more information, see *The Coddling of the American Mind*, especially chapters 1, 7, 8, and 9.

You'll find more materials at <https://www.thecoddling.com/wiser-k-12>