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Letters | As Hong Kong protests and pandemic add to the mental burden for youth, parents are the first line of defence

Journeying to adulthood is challenging in itself, more so for those youngsters who now have the added challenge of navigating political unrest and a global pandemic. They must feel they can turn to the adults for a listening ear and role models on how to best express and manage emotions

Topic | **Coronavirus pandemic**



Letters

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We can all agree that the past year has been exceptionally challenging for Hongkongers, and if there's anything we've learned, it's the importance of protecting our minds, just as we protect our bodies.

Young people, who are still developing mentally and emotionally, feel these challenges particularly intensely. Even during the best of times, young people have to navigate unfamiliar emotions as they make the journey to adulthood. The additional stress of months of political unrest, life during a global pandemic, and fears about our city's future only amplify the internal turmoil. When not properly addressed, this can lead to negative coping mechanisms like self-harm and substance abuse, or longer-term mental health issues.

Parents, carers, and concerned adults play a critical role in helping young people make sense of these tumultuous times and stay mentally healthy. Parents are the first teachers and role models we know, and with the increased amount of time young people are spending at home during the pandemic, parents are on the front lines of protecting our young people.

The first thing we can do is to listen. It's only by listening to youngsters that we are able to provide them with the help they need. Sometimes it can be difficult for us to listen, especially when we disagree with what young people are saying, but what's important is not to agree with everything, but to acknowledge the real emotions they are experiencing.

■ On Hong Kong's Diploma of Secondary Education exam results day, emotions run high

Second, we can practise healthy habits ourselves. One of the key strategies for mental health is to identify, express and manage our emotions. When young people are hesitant to share, we can take the first step by naming some of our own feelings and finding healthy ways to cope with them together.

Finally, we can help build confidence by empowering young people to solve problems and work through conflicts by themselves.

Tomorrow (October 10) is World Mental Health Day, and focusing on the mental well-being of our young people is more important now than ever before. As caring adults, our role is to equip youngsters with the tools needed to face the world, support them on the path they choose, and keep them safe while they are at it.

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Challenging times will always occur; the key is to walk alongside our young as they navigate the current moment and nurture their resilience, so that they can handle whatever the future throws at them.

Sky Siu, executive director, KELY Support Group