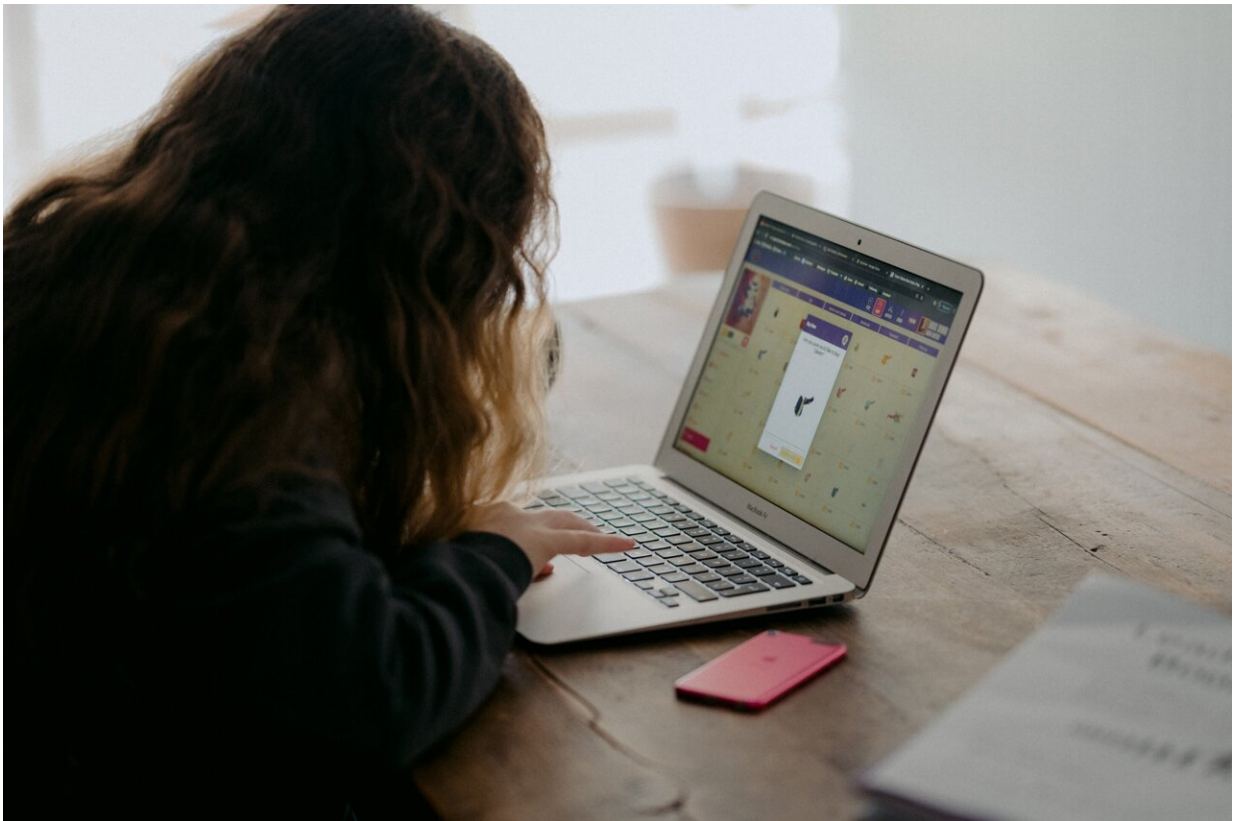


Study reveals brief online interventions help reduce teen depression

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A study of more than 2,400 adolescents ages 13 to 16 shows two online, single-session interventions designed to help curb teen depression works, a tool very much needed given a rise in teen depression and loss of some

in-person mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by Jessica Schleider, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Stony Brook University, the study findings are published in *Nature Human Behaviour*.

Teenagers who experience depression symptoms often cannot access professional help. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is estimated less than half of adolescents/teenagers with depression access help. One recent study suggested that childhood and [adolescent](#) anxiety and depression doubled during the first year of the pandemic.

For this study, adolescents experiencing elevated [depressive symptoms](#) participated in one of two online single-session interventions (SSI), the first teaching "behavioral activation" (the idea that taking positive action can boost your mood), and the second teaching "growth mindset" (the idea that depression symptoms and personal traits are changeable). They were recruited for the study via social media (Instagram) and came from all 50 U.S. states.

Schleider explains that pre-pandemic there was a need for more accessible avenues to treatment and mental health support for teens with mental health challenges. She and colleagues wanted to test whether single-session, online, and free-of-charge interventions could significantly reduce depression in teens who were struggling. They created a control, "placebo" SSI, and two skills-based SSIs: the behavioral activation program, and the growth mindset program. She and colleagues tested three-month outcomes measuring depression, hopelessness, generalized anxiety, COVID-related trauma, and restrictive eating.

"We discovered that both of the SSIs significantly reduced teens' [depression symptoms](#) and levels of hopelessness compared to the [control group](#) three months later," says Schleider. "On average, the effects on

depression were moderate, in some teens the SSIs helped reduce their symptoms a lot, for others only a small amount. But on a public health scale, since the programs are so easily accessible, and free, this type of intervention could help reduce the overall burden of depression in this vulnerable population of youth."

Their overall results, the authors write, confirm the utility of free-of-charge, online SSIs for high symptom adolescents, even in the high-stress COVID-19 context.

Schleider says that there is no surefire cure for [depression](#), and in-person therapy with trained professionals result in full [symptom](#) remission in around 50 percent of the time for adolescents/teenagers.

"Our SSIs aren't meant to replace other in-person counseling specific treatments," Schleider emphasizes. "They are more designed to be a safety net and an evidence-based support service for many teens who may otherwise have limited access to intervention or have not sought care."

More information: Jessica L. Schleider et al, A randomized trial of online single-session interventions for adolescent depression during COVID-19, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-021-01235-0](#)

Provided by Stony Brook University

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