

Do's and Don'ts



When talking about adolescents ...

Don't

Focus on risks and vulnerabilities—a counterproductive narrative already exaggerated in public understanding.

Restate myths or negative stereotypes about adolescents, even to debunk them.

Focus only on individual success as a measure of positive adolescent outcomes.

Talk about poor outcomes among young people of color and marginalized youth but leave out how systems disadvantage certain groups of young people.

Talk about the brain or brain development without explaining how it links to social, emotional, or identity development.

“Other” young people by solely referring to “they” or “them.”

Rely on the term “teenagers.”

Do

Emphasize the positives about adolescents and their development.

Focus on examples of youth service and activism.

Point out the benefits to society that result from positive social, emotional, and identity development.

Explain the structural factors like racism that lead to disparities and inequities among adolescents.

Use discovery metaphors to explain how adolescents benefit from opportunities to try things out and learn.

Remind audiences that we have all experienced this time of life by using “we” and “our.”

Define the term “adolescence.” Use age or grade ranges or descriptions like “the developmental period between childhood and adulthood.”
