

Introducing: A Comprehensive Mental Health Program Designed for Adolescents

Access to high-quality mental health care for adolescents has never been more essential.

In 2021 alone, over a third (37%) of high school students reported experiencing mental health struggles, and almost half (44%) said they persistently felt sad or hopeless, according to the Centers for Disease Control. And while those stark numbers were influenced by the pandemic, adolescent mental wellness was already a growing concern pre-COVID, in a world of always-on screens, social media, and other complex new challenges.

At Lightfully, we're committed to meeting those challenges head-on with a dynamic and comprehensive approach to delivering mental health care for young people in distress.

"Adolescents are facing a mental health care crisis, and they need access to care that is designed to meet their specific needs," says Lightfully CEO Jennifer Steiner. "A big part of the Lightfully mission is to provide that care, and it's why we're opening eight more adolescent treatment programs for teens over the next year."



Lightfully's distinctive approach, centered around our innovative clinical model of process-based therapy (PBT), provides a framework that enables adolescents to address the underlying causes of their suffering.

Here's how it works.

Seeing the Big Picture

Adolescents have complex mental health needs that are different from adults. In fact, their brains are still developing, which means they don't always make decisions the way adults would. For example, they might be more impulsive and quicker to make harmful decisions, and they often struggle to express their emotions and values.

"Since the adolescent brain is still 'under construction,' we have such a unique opportunity to help shape their experiences," says Megan Ledet, LCSW, Vice President of Adolescent Services. "When asked, adolescents sometimes struggle to verbalize their feelings and thoughts, and that's because they truly require assistance to understand those internal workings. At Lightfully, we've developed a treatment program specifically designed to help adolescents better understand themselves and their world."

With an initial assessment in place, our Lightfully adolescent care teams then put together a comprehensive treatment program that targets the negative processes a young client may be feeling, and uses data-driven interventions to create measurable results and promote long-term well-being.



Program Essentials

Lightfully's adolescent care program is specifically designed for ages 12 to 17, from middle school through high school. We offer a complete continuum of care, from residential treatments centers for extended stays, to partial hospitalization stays while residing at home, intensive outpatient options, and virtual care as well—all uniquely designed for adolescent clients.

Here are some of the ways our adolescent program is uniquely different:

The Approach

Our holistic PBT clinical model is focused first on the unique client and the unique ways they may be suffering, rather than a compartmentalized diagnosis. Truth is, most people facing mental health challenges are often dealing with multiple issues, of varying degrees of severity, that don't fit neatly into a one-size-only diagnosis with a rigid menu of interventions.

The PBT model is designed with that human complexity in mind, addressing the processes behind the symptoms and maladaptive behaviors our teens are demonstrating. This means care at Lightfully can be customized to include a range of appropriate interventions that target the core sources of adolescents' suffering—and not simply a list of symptoms. It's something that is especially important for adolescents, who are often grappling with unique and complicated emotions while also facing significant disruptions to their lives.

The Interventions

PBT is an intentional and systematic integration of evidence-based modalities, including cognitive behavior therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, trauma-informed therapies, and others. DNA-V, one of the evidence-based modalities that is integrated for adolescents, is

a model that helps teens explore their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and realign the things they value most in life, making strength and healing a prioritization in their personalized treatment plans. (DNA-V is an acronym for the model's four foundational skills: Discoverer, Noticer, Adviser, and Values.)

The Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP) is another evidence-based intervention integrated into the PBT framework at Lightfully. SSP is a trauma-informed approach that is based on Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 1994). SSP promotes arousal reduction and emotion regulation through the activation of the vagus nerve with specially filtered music. SSP is offered in addition to individual and family therapy sessions.



By using this range of holistic interventions, we make care more digestible and engaging for our adolescent clients. We've also found that these methods help our patients learn to voice their feelings and advocate for their wellness—even after their time at Lightfully—creating a meaningful, long-term impact.

“We take pride in the fact that Lightfully does not fixate on a diagnosis or provide a ‘one-size-fits-all, this is what we’re going to do’ approach to help you with these symptoms,” says Stephanie Thompson, DSW, LCSW, Lightfully’s Director of Clinical Operations. “Instead, we’re saying ‘Let’s have a discussion about what’s happening in your life, describe what it is that you’re experiencing, and talk to me about the things that carry meaning to you.’ And from there, we can validate them, help to normalize their experiences, and work alongside them to devise a treatment plan that they can invest in. Lightfully provides unique opportunities for each person to recover at a pace they can manage, and based on things they value in the time they can dedicate.”

The Families

Our family program is designed and led by Caroline Nichols, LICSW, National Director of Family and Support Services. “Family involvement is an essential component of treatment for the adolescent. At Lightfully we view families as part of the solution rather than the problem,” Nichols says. “We recognize that families don’t cause mental health disorders and we help families move away from shame and stigma and into efficacy and empowerment. We work with families through an Emotion Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) lens with behavior coaching and emotion coaching, so that when their child returns home, the family can provide continued support for their loved one.”



Family sessions occur twice weekly at residential levels of care, and weekly at lower levels of care. A free weekly family support group is also offered to provide families with connection and support during and after their child is in treatment.

The Vibe

Our adolescent-only residential treatment centers (RTC) in California are designed to be welcoming for younger patients, with an environment that feels like home as much as possible, and facilitates relationships between patients and staff, while strengthening the relationships at home. Bedrooms include

single- and double-occupancy, and the typical residence houses up to six clients at a time. Each residence also includes shared living areas, a classroom, yoga and arts spaces, outdoors spaces for activities, and, of course, a kitchen with a full-time chef.

By design, our adolescent RTCs are gender-inclusive and embrace diversity. A typical stay for an adolescent might be 30-45 days, and sometimes more if needed. If a client starts with residential treatment, the step-down process can then include transition to partial hospitalization, intensive outpatient, virtual intensive outpatient, or traditional outpatient care.

The Support Teams

Our adolescent care staffers are specifically trained to treat young people within the PBT framework as part of our overall Equip training model. Just as important, we recruit team members who will be very relatable to younger clients. That means a very diverse team—from clinicians to program managers and chefs—all of whom bring an appropriate array of personalities and experiences to the milieu.

“We want young people to feel like they’re at home, that they belong.

Our diverse staff of professionals may remind them of an aunt or a friend, and make them think, ‘Hey, you understand me because you’re also part of the LGBTQ community or you’re like a mentor to me,” Thompson says. “Having a diverse team is essential to creating a safe and comfortable environment for today’s youth.”

Schooling at Lightfully

Lightfully’s adolescent programs are equipped with certified teachers and have dedicated school time so our clients can maintain their studies while receiving state of the art mental health treatment.

“Life doesn’t stop when someone decides it’s time to prioritize their mental health,” explains Megan Ledet, LCSW, Lightfully’s Vice President of Adolescent Services. “We want teens and their families to understand they don’t have to sacrifice studies in order to receive the mental health treatment they need. By allowing time for school to take place, we are preparing our clients to successfully navigate their world post-treatment, which, simply put, is the ultimate goal of everything we do here at Lightfully.”

School and homework time is offered at our residential and partial hospitalization levels of care. Our certified teacher and support staff will coordinate with your school of choice so that assignments are obtained, completed, and submitted in a timely and consistent manner.

“School can be a source of anxiety and stress for many teens,” Ledet says. “Our clients are able to address these stressors throughout treatment, and are ultimately able to create new experiences around performance and schooling.”

Lightfully is designed to incorporate school into the overall framework of treatment, creating a holistic environment for young people to grow and heal.