

Are the kids all right? Associations among emerging adults' experiences, anxiety, and coping.

Emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a feeling of being “in between” adolescence and adulthood, and the perception that the future holds many possibilities (Arnett, 2000). Although many emerging adults navigate this stage with minimal difficulty, some may be prone to adjustment difficulties and anxiety (Arnett, 2007). One method of coping is to minimize contact with aversive experiences (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999), which reduces short-term distress but may impair long-term functioning. Alternatively, mindfulness permits a client to observe a stimulus without judging or reacting to it and reduces the rigidity that underlies many disorders (Hayes, 2004; Hayes et al., 2013). It may also increase openness to experience. The aim of this exploratory study was to assess correlations among aspects of emerging adulthood, avoidance, openness, anxiety, and mindfulness.

One hundred and sixty-seven students, mostly freshmen (71.7%), at a public university in the southeastern U.S. completed this study. The sample was largely female (62.9%) and Caucasian (74.9%). Roughly one third (35.3%) of the sample identified as first-generation students, and a variety of majors were represented. About one-fourth (28.7%) reported having experience with meditation or mindfulness. High levels of identification with the Instability ($r = .451, p < .001$), and Feeling In-Between ($r = .270, p = .027$) facets of emerging adulthood were associated with greater experiential avoidance; greater identification with Self-Focus was negatively associated with experiential avoidance ($r = -.236, p = .002$). Greater identification with Identity Exploration ($r = -.191, p = .014$) and Instability ($r = -.365, p < .001$) were associated with lower mindfulness. Our results suggest that mindfulness could be useful for managing distress associated with being in the transition period of emerging adulthood. We will also discuss more detailed results related to the impact of emerging adulthood on anxiety and openness.