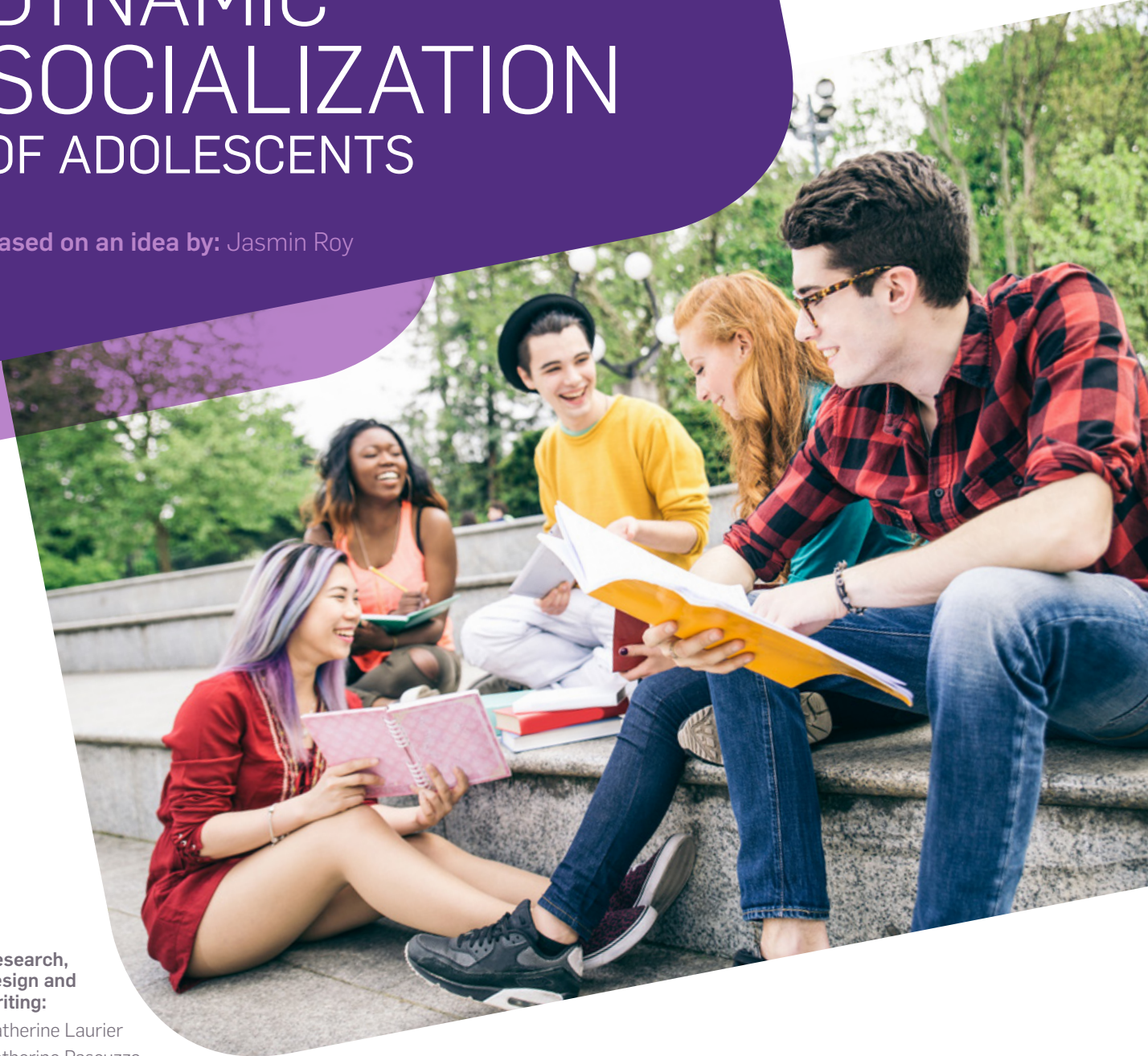


A GUIDE TO PROMOTE THE DYNAMIC SOCIALIZATION OF ADOLESCENTS

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PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

Extracurricular activities that teens have had to put aside during the pandemic are more than just entertainment. These activities are ways to develop relationships, share common goals with peers, and work with inspiring adults, who can act as role models. Organized leisure activities are ideal contexts for their development. They include sports (individual or team), arts and culture (e.g., music, dance, theatre, painting), youth clubs (e.g., scouts, student life, volunteering), etc.

These activities have various benefits that contribute to developmental tasks of adolescence (Denault and Poulin, 2012). For example, these activities allow them to develop their autonomy by giving them opportunities to make individual choices and negotiate a degree of independence from their families. In addition, participation in a variety of extracurricular activities contributes to identity formation through a process of exploring various social identities, while facilitating access to groups of friends who have similar interests. Commitment to and involvement in activities also allows children to reinforce their knowledge, skills and interpersonal relationships. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities allows them to realize that mastering skills and developing quality relationships requires time, practice, perseverance and patience! Youth who participate in organized leisure activities generally have better academic performance, higher academic ambitions, fewer internalized and externalized problems, and become more actively engaged citizens as adults. This is particularly true for at-risk youth (e.g., academically and/or psychosocially), who seem to derive even greater benefit from these activities (Denault and Poulin, 2012).

In addition to these benefits, it is recognized that physical activity reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as stress, psychological problems and isolation (Grasdalsmoen et al., 2020; Laurier et al., 2021; Stubbs et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2014; Wipfli et al., 2008). Considering the high level of distress experienced by youth during the pandemic (Laurier et al., 2021), physical activity is a key protective factor that promotes their adjustment. Moreover, the World Health Organization (2020) recommends physical activity to prevent depression at all ages and beyond the context of the pandemic. In young adults, regularly participating in physical or sports activities is an effective strategy to lower distress levels during COVID-19 (Shanahan et al., 2020). However, among children and adolescents, physical and sports activities have significantly decreased during the pandemic. Many parents even report that their time spent with family has become more sedentary during this period (Moore et al., 2020). During COVID-19, it is therefore recommended that adolescents participate in physical activities.

Although physical activity and sports practised at home or outdoors while complying with health and social measures is possible and can be easily accessible to adolescents (e.g., street hockey, jogging, tennis, etc.), the school is still a fundamental environment with regard to the availability, accessibility and diversity of activities in which teenagers can participate (e.g., access to equipment and premises such as the gym and swimming pool). The school environment's role is even more important for certain youth who come from underprivileged backgrounds or unsafe neighbourhoods. At school, teenagers also often have access to responsible adults, who ensure that these activities take place in positive and optimal conditions. Adults thus play a primary and essential role, since those who support adolescents during their leisure activities and who believe in the benefits of these activities significantly contribute to the participation of these youth in these activities by acting as role models (Denault and Poulin, 2012). For these reasons, in order to encourage the resumption of adolescents' psychosocial development, we recommend that the school environment actively promote extracurricular activities and social and artistic initiatives. The development of interests, personal talents, sports skills and/or those aimed at developing the future plans of youth should be promoted within schools and in the community.

