



PRESS RELEASE

EUGENE FAMILY YMCA LAUNCHES SOCIALIZATION PROGRAM IN LIGHT OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Y steps up in response to U.S. Surgeon General's December advisory on pandemic's negative effects on youth mental health

Eugene, Ore., January 18, 2022 —

Hearing the call to support preteens during a years-long pandemic, the Eugene Family YMCA has committed to offering regular Middle School Madness nights, which provide opportunities for middle schoolers to socialize, be physically active, play new games and leave with a sense of belonging.



"Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide—and rates have increased over the past decade," said U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy in his [Dec. 7 advisory](#). "The COVID-19 pandemic further altered their experiences at home, school, and in the community, and the effect on their mental health has been devastating. The future wellbeing

of our country depends on how we support and invest in the next generation."

The YMCA in Eugene was founded in 1887 on the University of Oregon campus to support college students. Since then, the Y has been a place where young people find belonging and connection as they focus on their physical health, which in turn improves mental health.

"Middle schoolers need peer connection and guidance from trusted adults to thrive," said Holly Kriz Anderson, Senior Director of Youth Programs for the Eugene Family YMCA. "Not only do these nights offer an exclusive opportunity for middle schoolers to experience the Y on their own, but they also help these youth make lasting connections with their peers and fun, caring adults."

Middle School Madness gives youth a chance to play group games in the gym, eat snacks, play board and card games in the lobby, and try their hand at interactive video games—at a time when the facility is closed to members. Up to 60 middle schoolers can participate, separated into 4 groups of 15 for COVID safety.

"We launched this program pre-COVID and it was wildly successful," said Kriz Anderson. "We know these opportunities for preteens are desperately needed, especially now after 2 years of pandemic life."

When the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent

Psychiatry and Children’s Hospital Association [declared a national emergency](#) in child and adolescent mental health in October 2021, they pointed out that, “Adolescents are in a developmental stage of growth discovering and defining their role among peers and in the community and forming their values and identity within that context. The pandemic has disrupted peer interactions that are a critical developmental task during adolescence, leaving adolescents at higher risk for anxiety and depression because of social isolation and reliance on technology for social interactions.”

Middle School Madness aims to engage preteens, get them moving their bodies, making friends and learning new activities. It is strong connections to family and community as well as skills such as problem-solving, conflict resolution and anger management that are proven protective factors against mental health problems.

"The Y will always find ways to be there when the community needs us," said Eugene Family YMCA CEO Brian Steffen. "Our adolescent youth are in crisis and we know the Y can help. Middle School Madness nights are an innovative way for the Y to extend a caring hand to preteens at a time when their world has been upended."

Middle School Madness nights are scheduled regularly throughout the year. The next Middle School Madness night is Friday, Feb. 11 from 7 to 11 p.m.

Learn more [HERE](#).

Note: Photos taken pre-COVID. COVID safety protocols, including masks, will be required during Middle School Madness nights.



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About the Eugene Family YMCA

The Eugene Family YMCA is one of the region's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Each year across Lane County, the Y engages more than 18,000 people regardless of age, gender, income or background—to nurture the potential of children, teens and seniors; improve health and well-being; and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. In 2020, the Eugene Family YMCA awarded \$413,506 in financial assistance. The YMCA has been serving the Eugene-area since 1887.

