

WHAT TEENS NEED NOW

Addressing
the adolescent
mental health crisis



HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT AN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS?

- **Teen mental health was worsening before the pandemic**
- **The pandemic was particularly hard on teen mental health**
- **We do not have clinical workforce we need to care for teens**

ADOPTING A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

PRIMARY PREVENTION

POPULATION-WIDE INTERVENTIONS

SECONDARY PREVENTION

EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION

TERTIARY PREVENTION

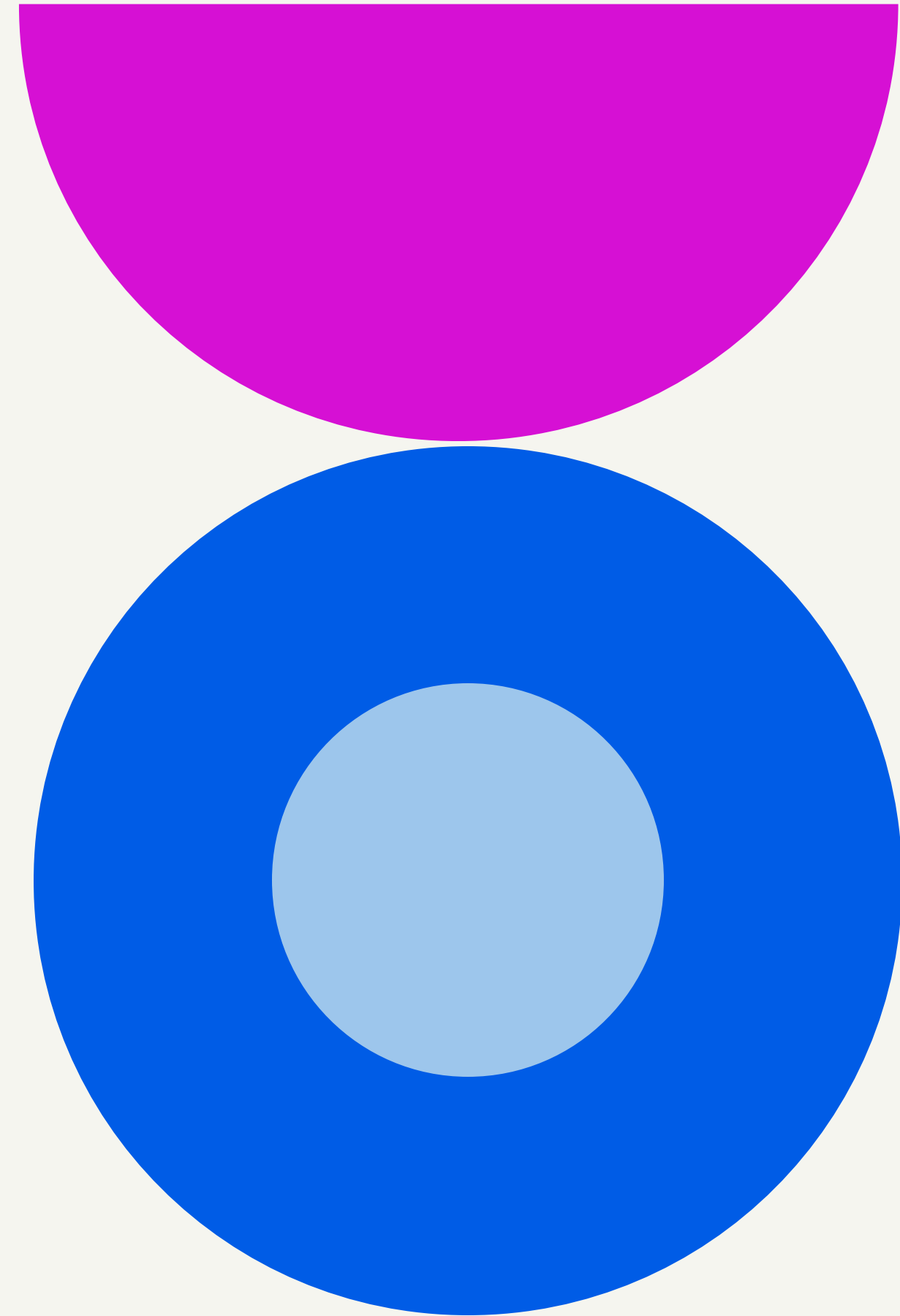
EFFECTIVE CLINICAL TREATMENT



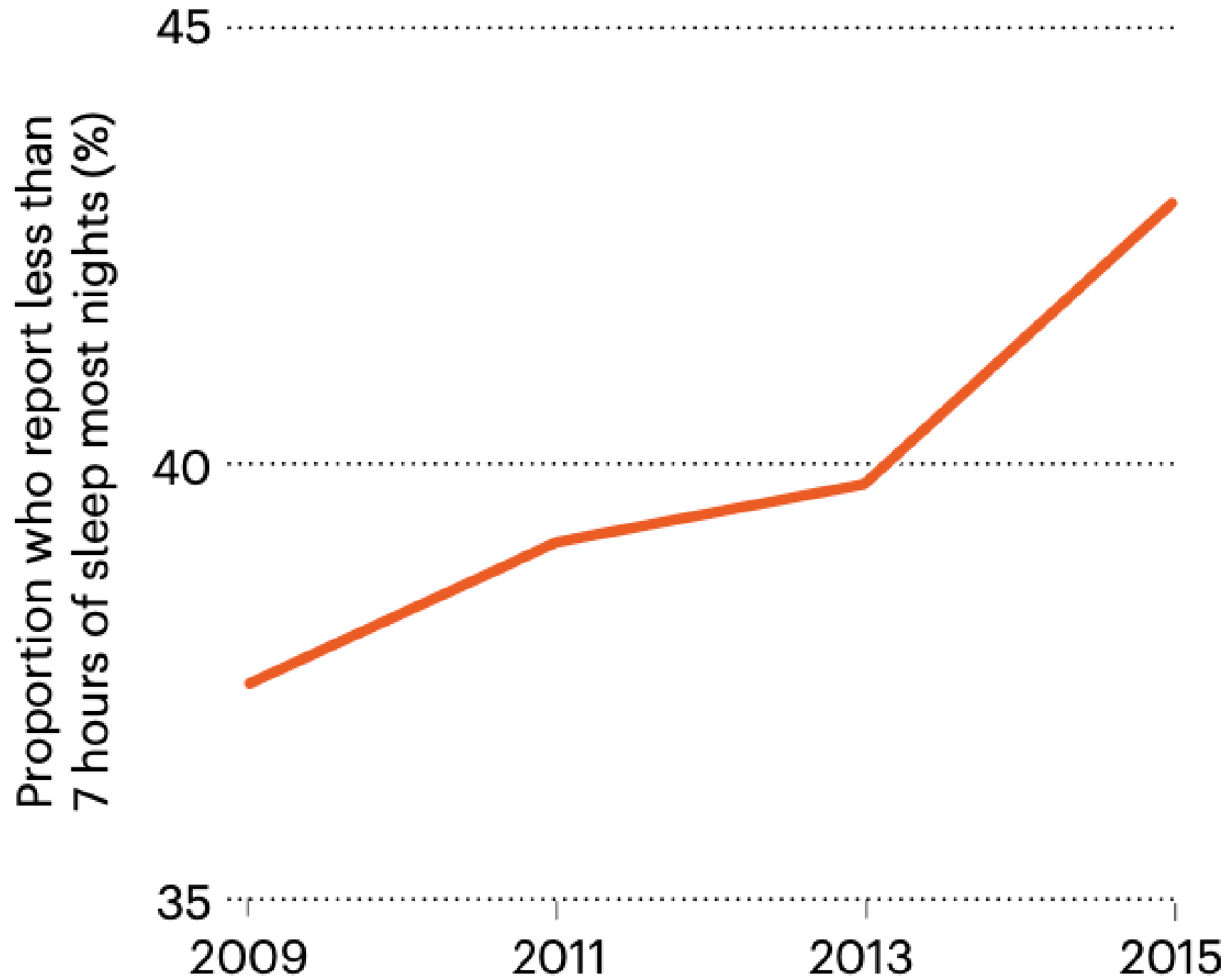
Primary Prevention

Primary Prevention

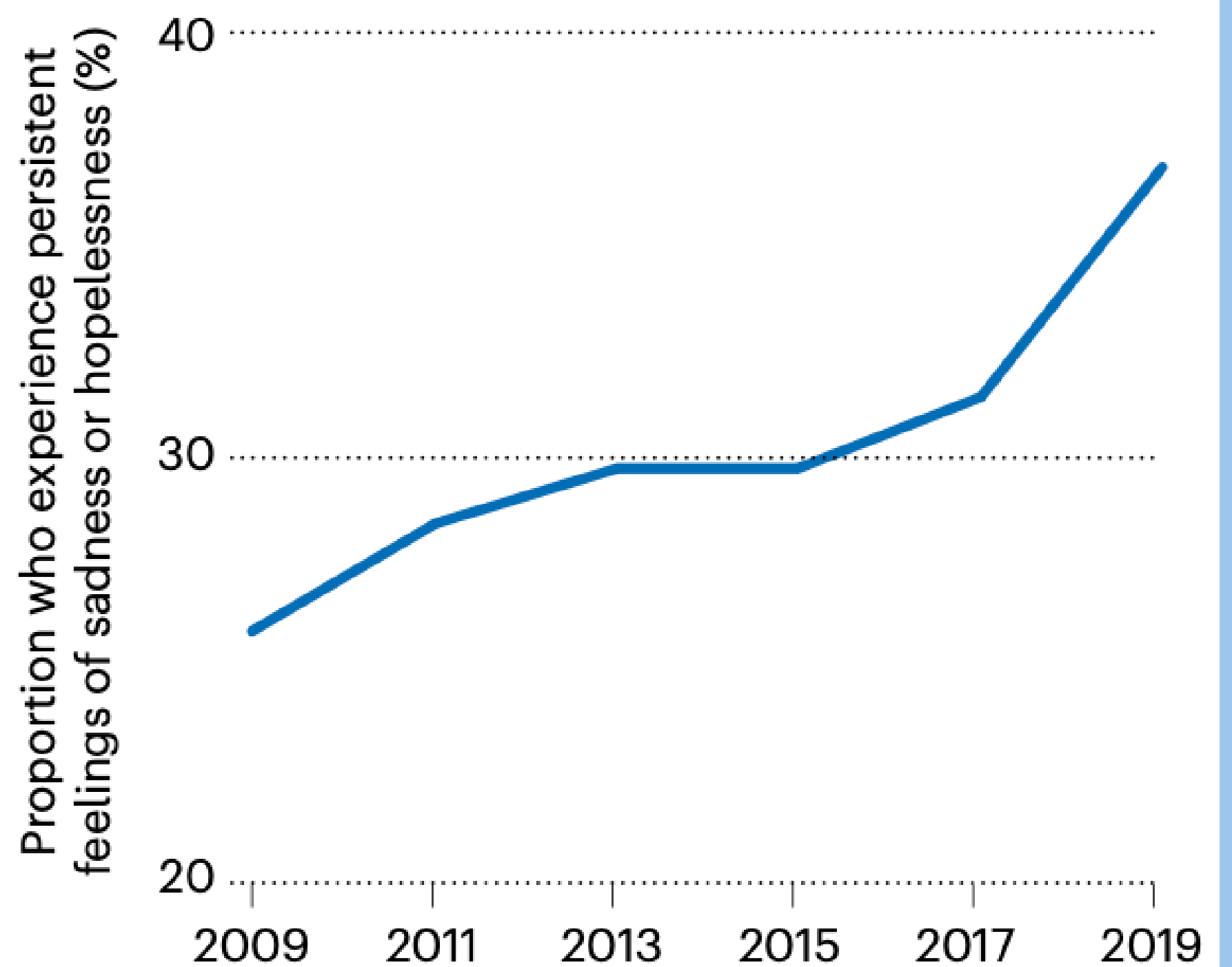
**ONE: PROTECT
ADOLESCENT SLEEP**



Worsening sleep



Worsening mental-health problems



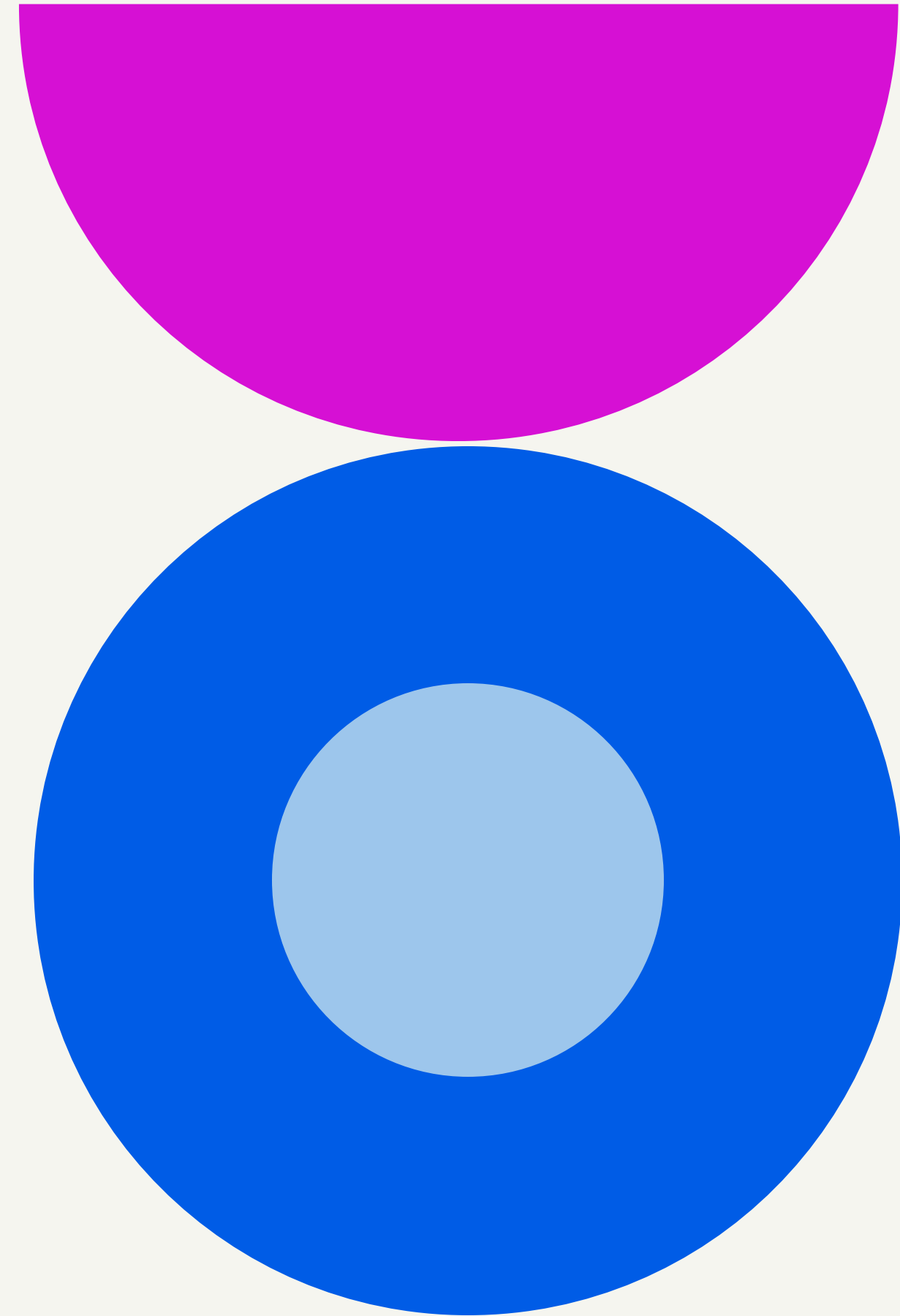
To protect teen sleep we need:

- Delayed school start times
- Public health campaigns to build awareness of how much sleep teens actually need
- Individualized assessment of barriers to sleep



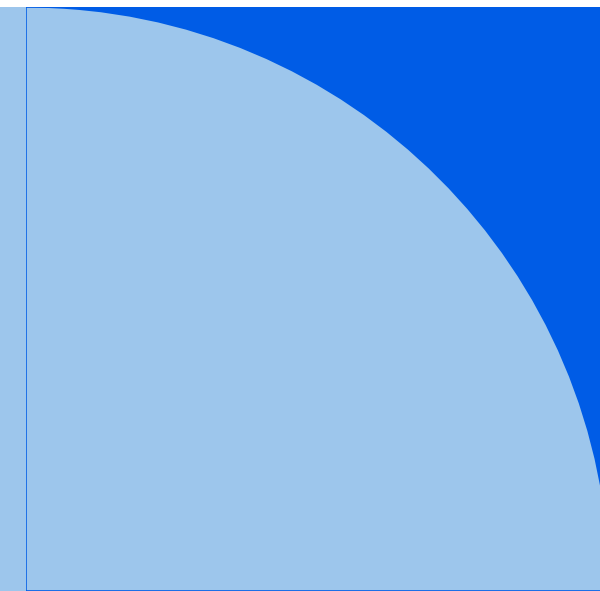
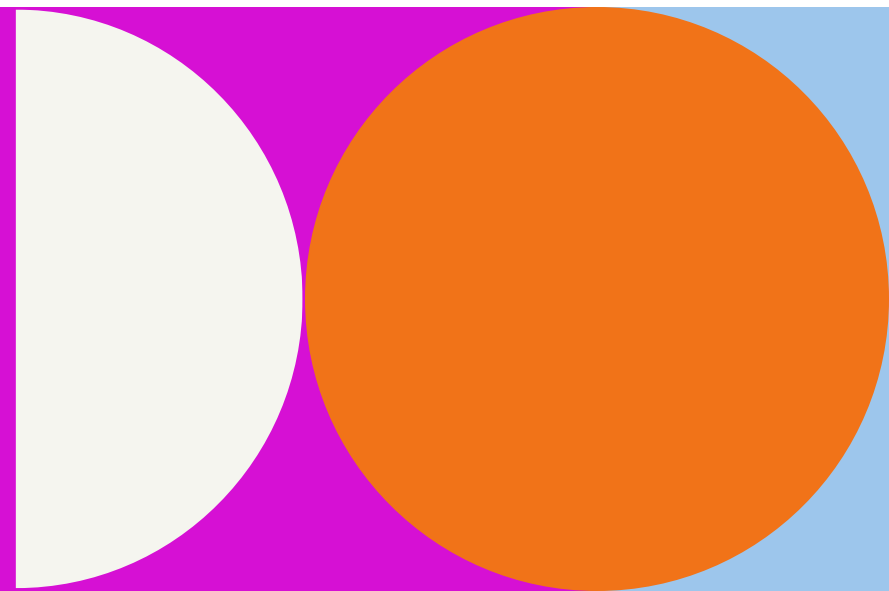
Primary Prevention

**TWO: SURROUND TEENS
WITH CARING ADULTS**



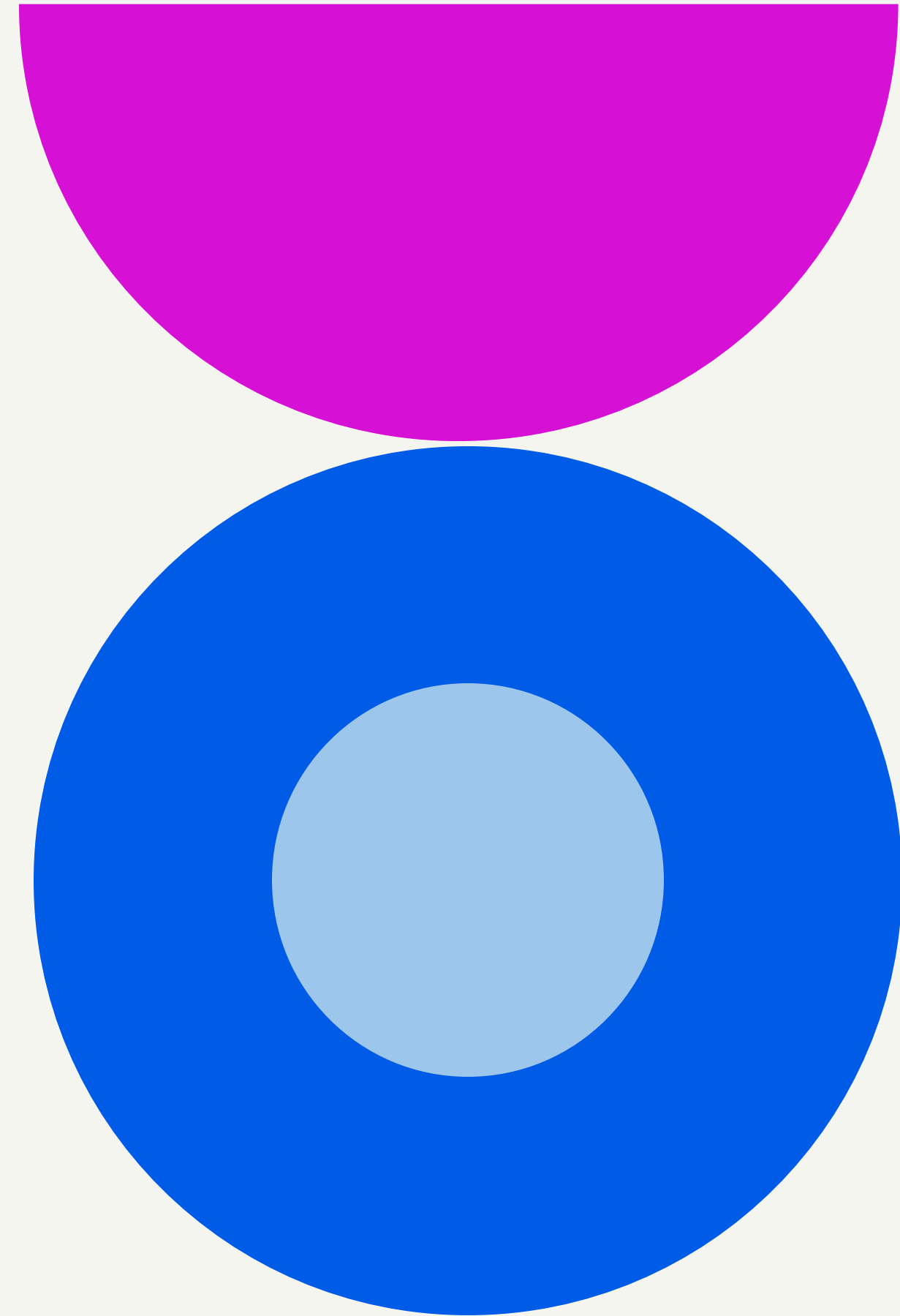
To surround teens with caring adults we need to:

- Educate the adults around teenagers about typical adolescent development
- Make teaching an attractive profession
- Support a range of meaningful after-school programs and activities led by caring adults



Primary Prevention

**THREE: GIVE TEENS
REAL RESPONSIBILITIES**



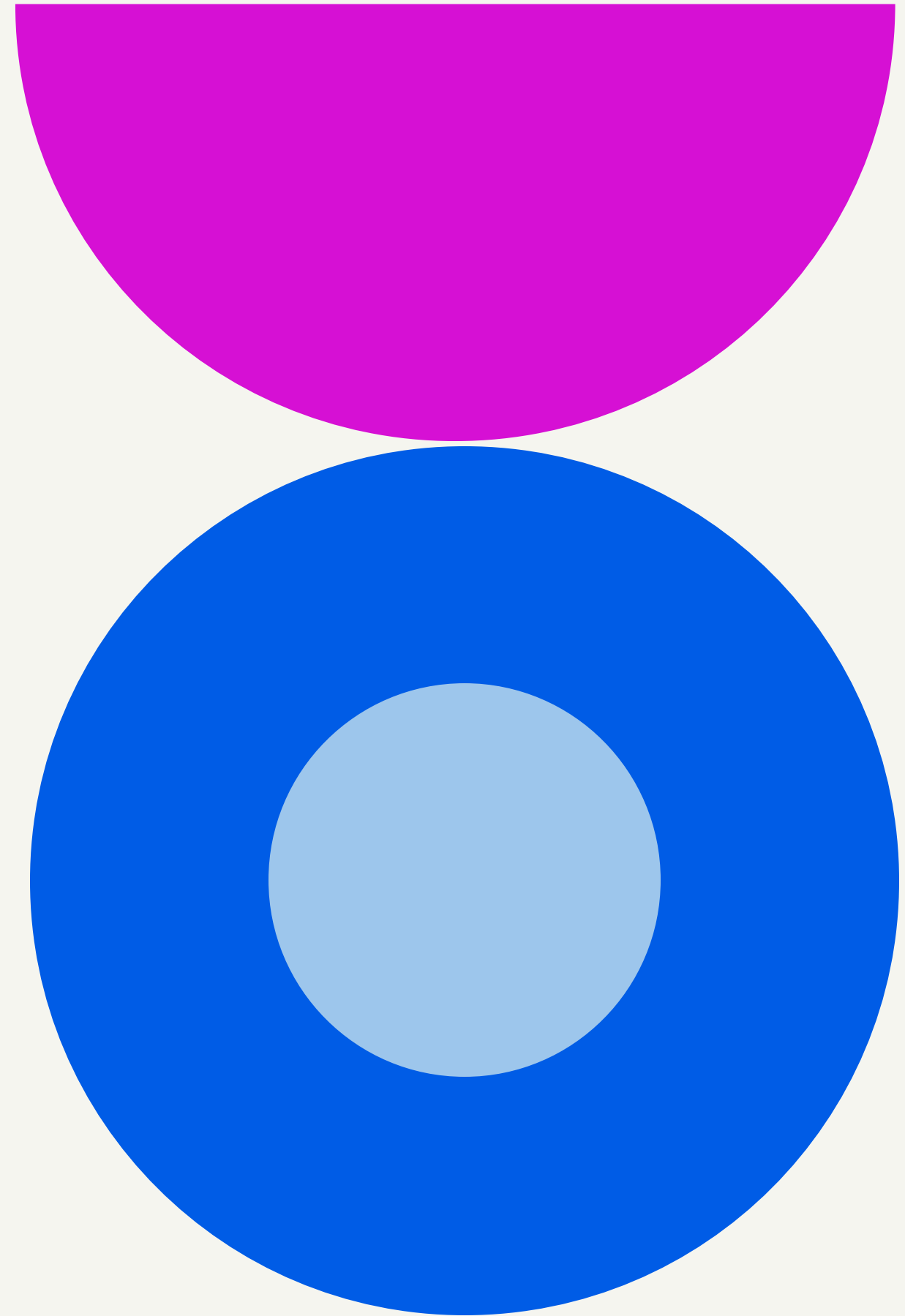
Having a sense of purpose promotes adolescent well-being

- Teens need to feel that they are *counted on*
- At home: chores, responsibilities, involvement in family decision-making
- Outside the home: serving as a mentor or tutor, having team or leadership roles, involvement with social causes



Primary Prevention

ADJUSTING
CURRENT
APPROACHES



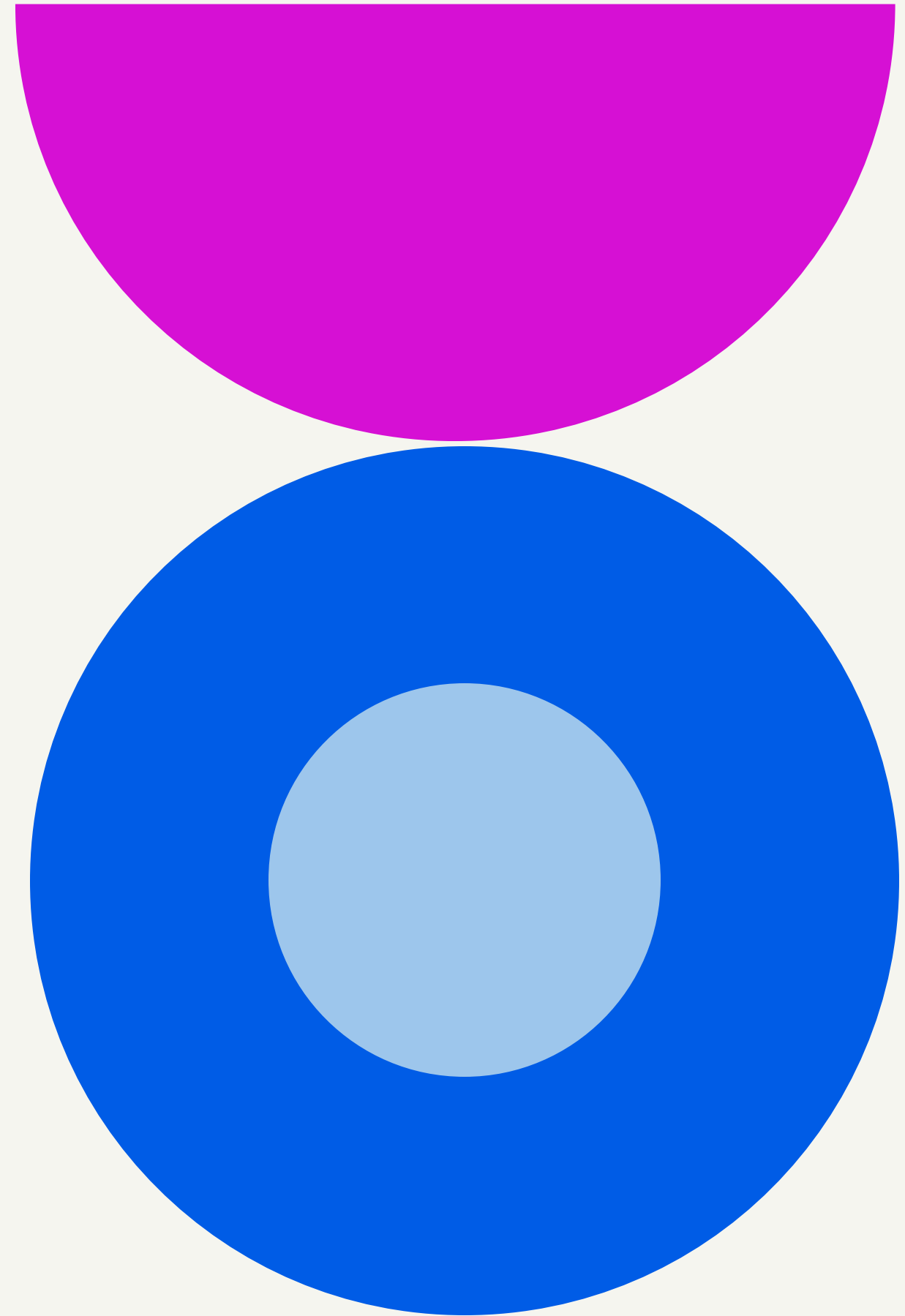
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) should center on:

- Accurately defining mental health
- Normalizing distress as part of life
- Healthy vs. unhealthy COPING
- The role of adults in addressing serious concerns teens may have about themselves or their friends



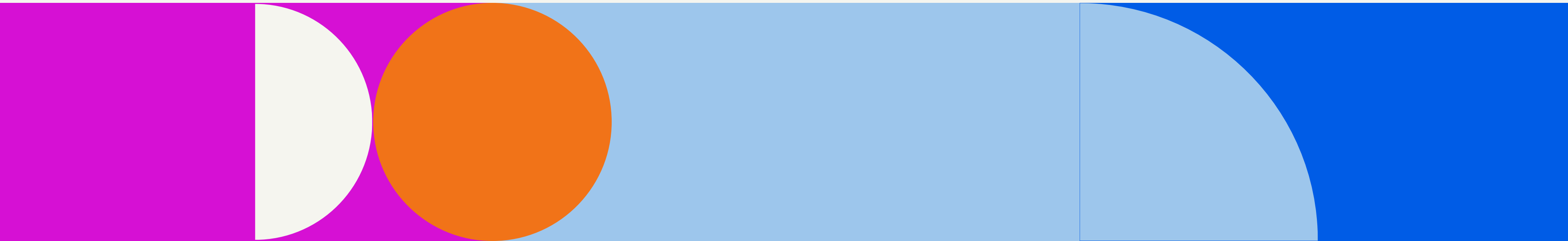
Primary Prevention

RESEARCH
RECOMMENDATION



Broad surveys should:

- Assess both internalizing AND externalizing symptoms
- Ask about both negative AND positive moods



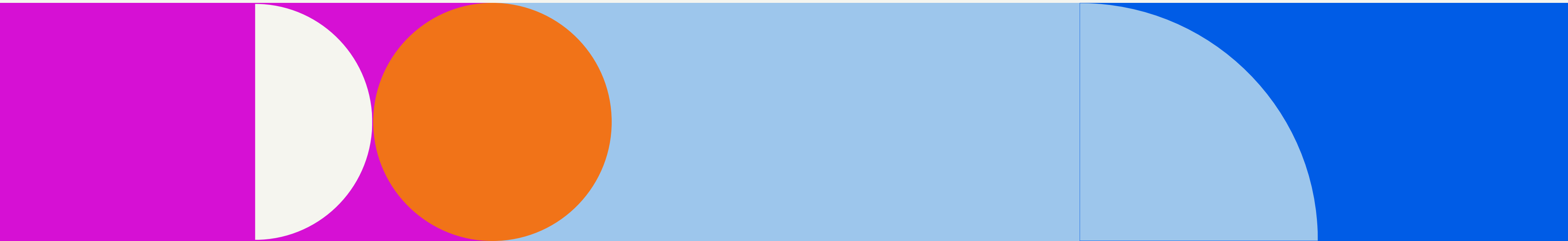
“There is, however, growing anthropological and sociological support for the concept that society gets the type of adolescent it expects and deserves.”

-James Anthony, MD (1969). The reaction of adults to adolescents and their behavior. In *Adolescence: Psychological Perspectives*

WFF/Gallup/ Damour

“Voices of Gen Z Study”

- Surveyed 10 to 18-year-olds about a range of topics, including mood
- Our questions asked about emotions they felt “a lot” of on the previous day



Did you feel any of the following a lot of the day yesterday?



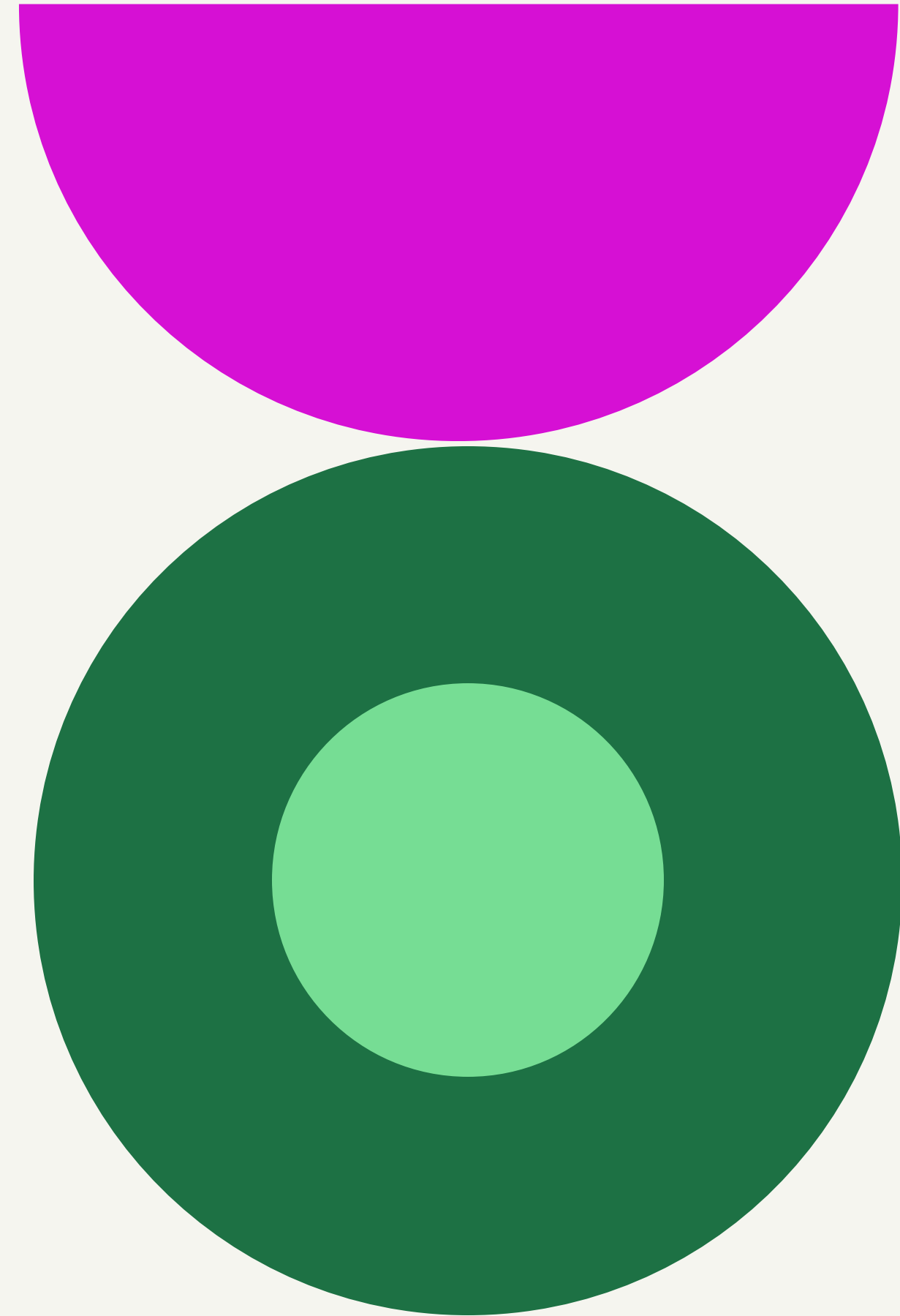
WFF-Gallup-Damour Voices of Gen Z Study, March 13-20, 2024



Secondary Prevention

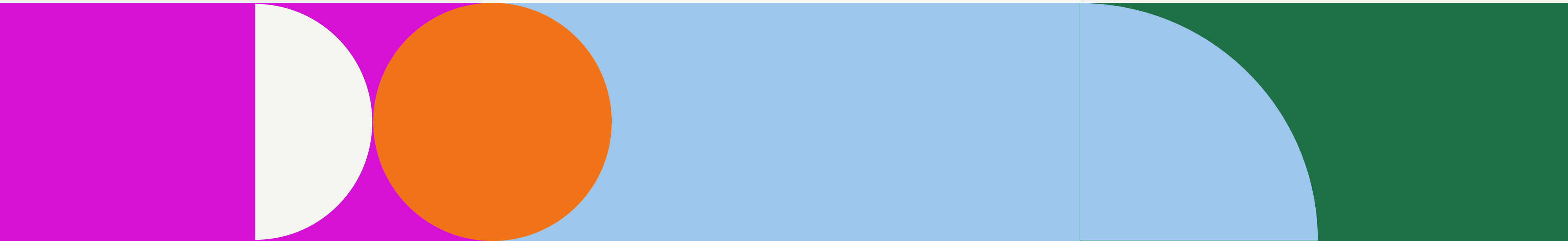
Secondary Prevention

**ONE: CONFIRM
THAT EVERY TEEN IS
ANCHORED TO AN
ADULT AT SCHOOL**



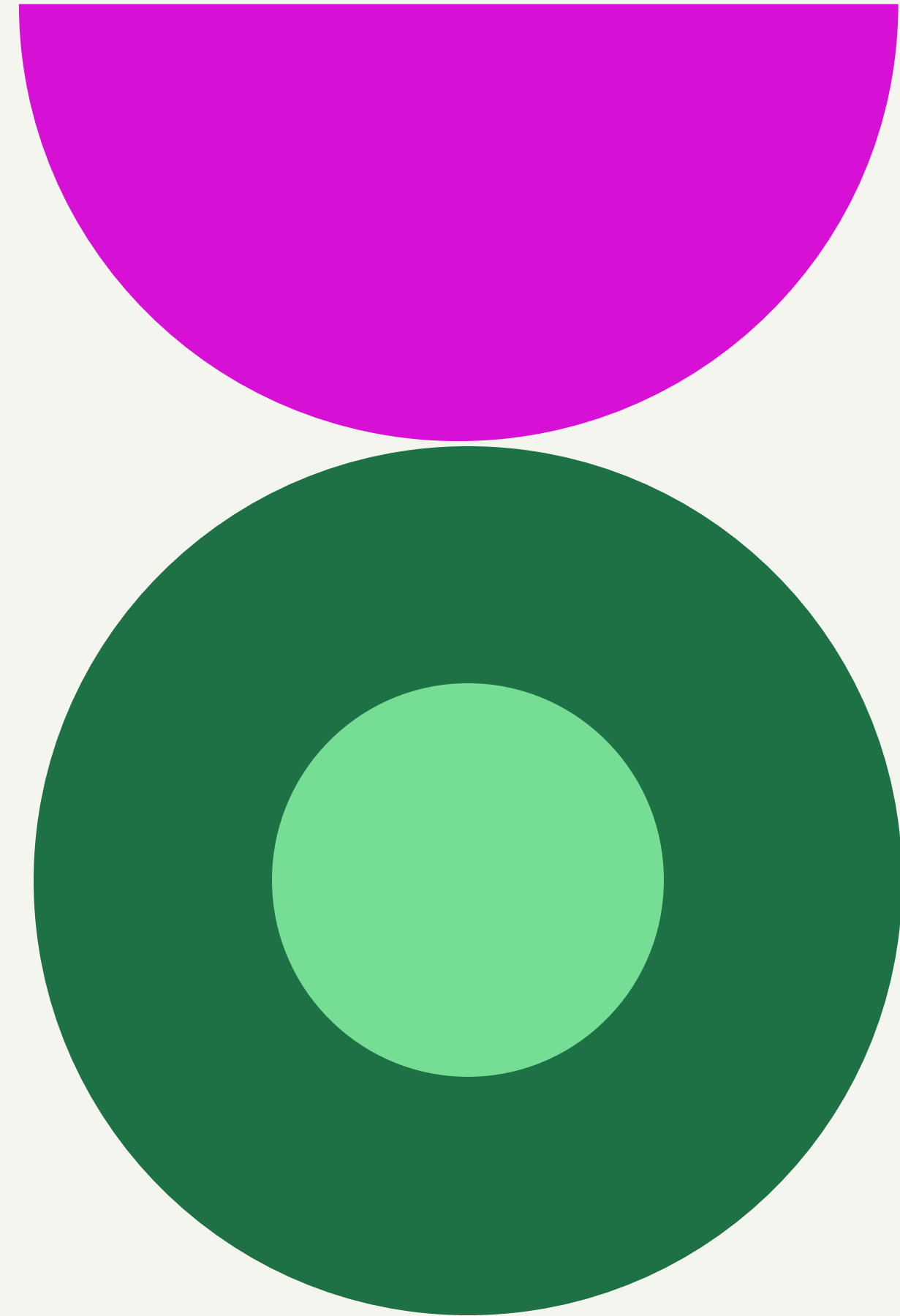
Relationship mapping At school

- Program available through the Making Caring Common program at the Harvard Graduate School of Ed
- Measures adult-to-student and student-to-adult connections within school communities
- Rapidly identifies teens who are not anchored to an adult



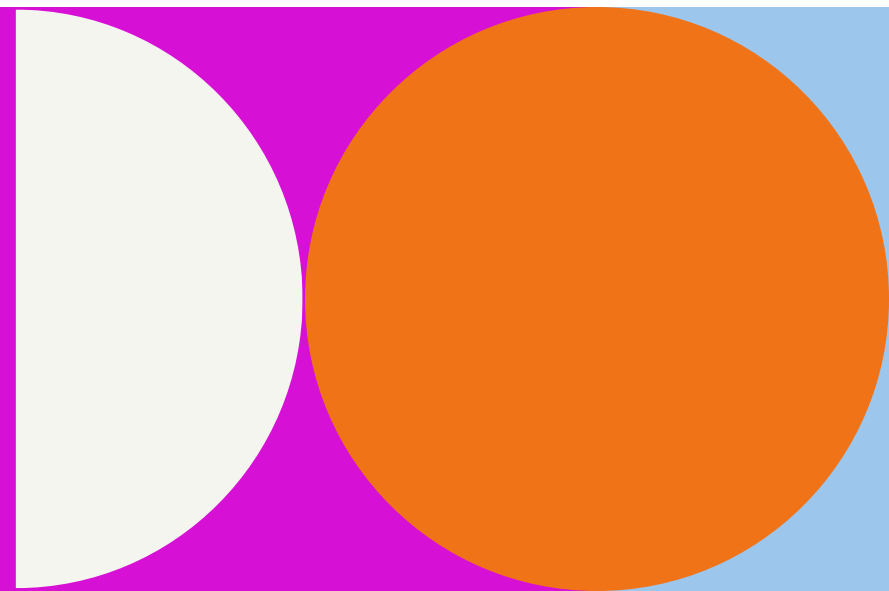
Secondary Prevention

**TWO: HELP TEENS
ALERT ADULTS
WHEN WORRIED
ABOUT A PEER**



Teens are the first to know which peers are suffering

- Treat teens as partners in identifying peers who need help
- Ensure that teens know what to share and that they'll share it
- Know that this helps two teens at once: the peer who is suffering and the friend who is worrying





WHEN A TEEN'S FRIEND IS IN CRISIS

by Lisa Damour, PhD

We never want teenagers to regret seeking help for a friend in crisis. To respond effectively while respecting teens' loyalty to their peers, follow the steps below.

- 1) Offer reassurance:** "You were right to let me know. This is what good friends do."
- 2) Empathize:** "This is heavy. How long have you been carrying it? Are you okay?"
- 3) Move forward together. Barring an immediate safety concern, make a plan for alerting the friend's parents or caregivers:**
 - "Do you want to tell them, or should I?"
 - "Do you want to give your friend the option of telling her folks herself, then having them let us know that she did?"
 - "Is there an anonymous way to do this?"

If the friend's parents ignore the problem, or are the problem, suggest the same options for involving a school counselor or administrator.

Remind your teenager that adults need to know if a friend engages in any of the following:

- Self-harm
- Very risky behavior
- Eating disordered behavior
- Depression or suicidality
- Dangerous relationships



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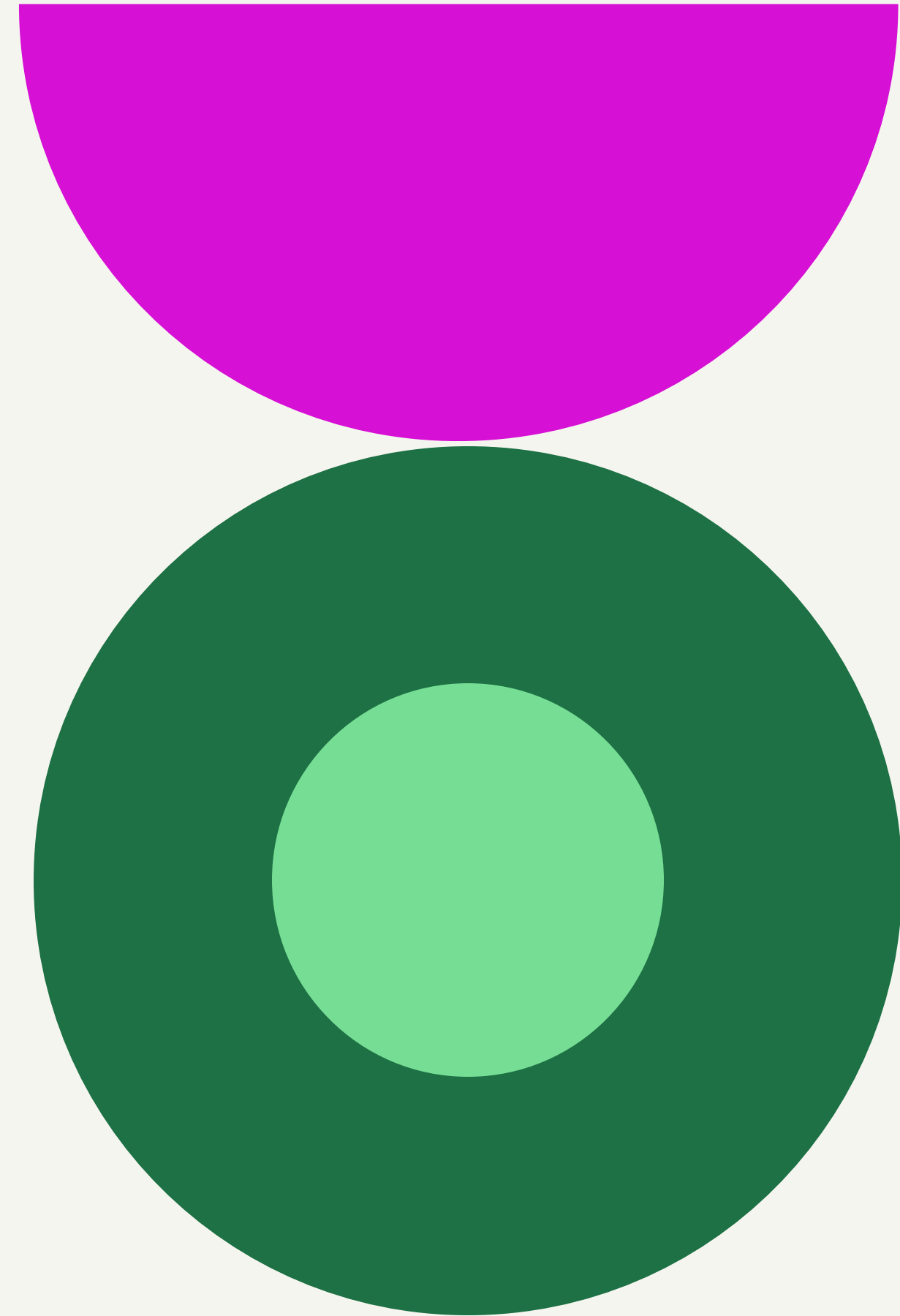


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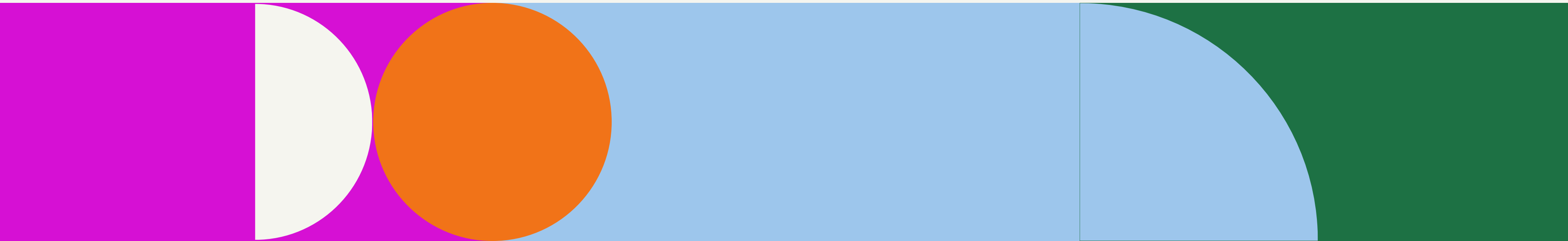
Secondary Prevention

**THREE: TAKE
SCHOOL ABSENCE
VERY SERIOUSLY**



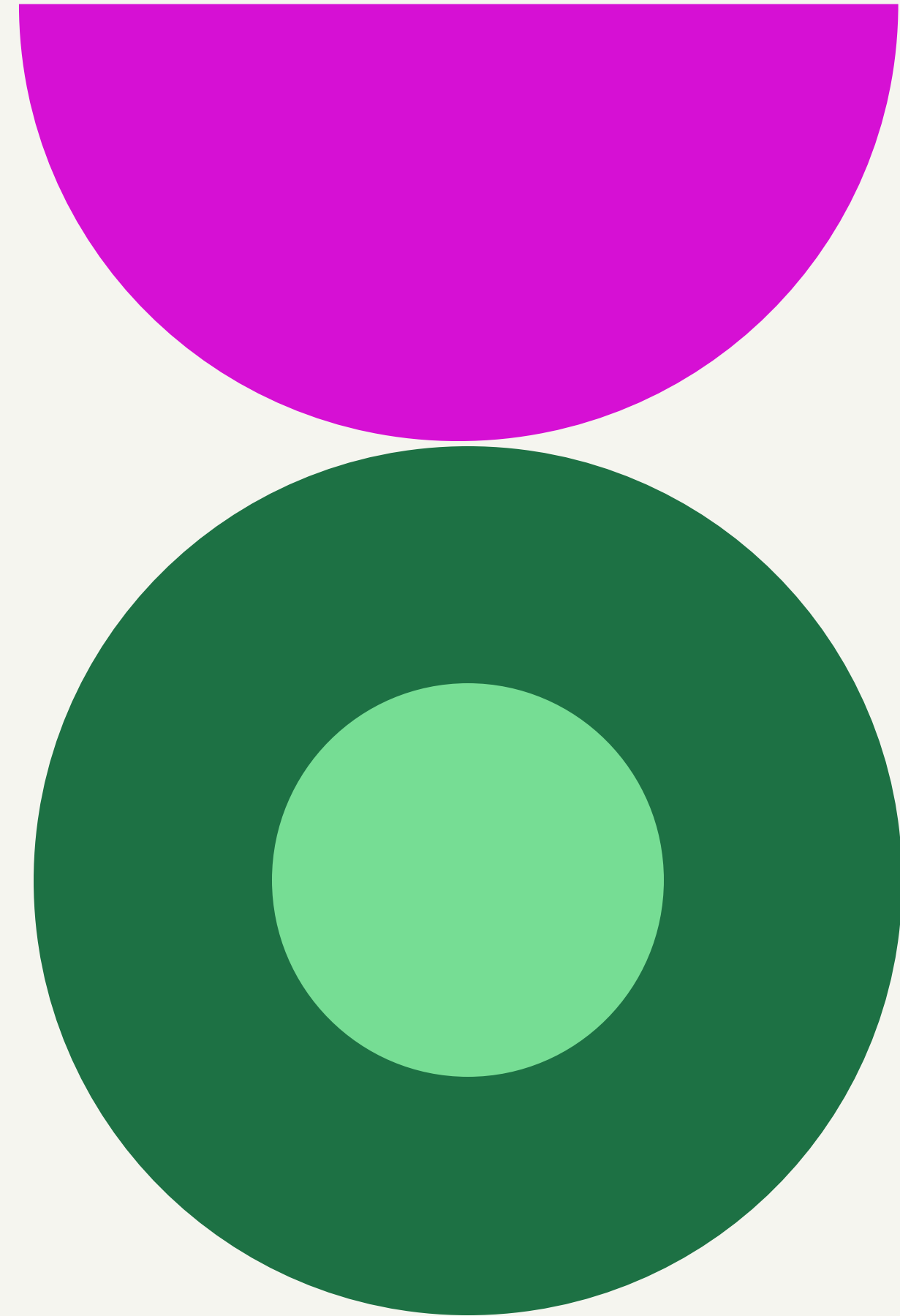
Chronic absenteeism remains far above pre-COVID levels

- Percentage of chronically absent students
 - 2018-2019: 15%
 - 2022-2023: 28%
 - 2023-2024: 23% (estimated)
- Assess and address causes of avoidance on an individualized basis



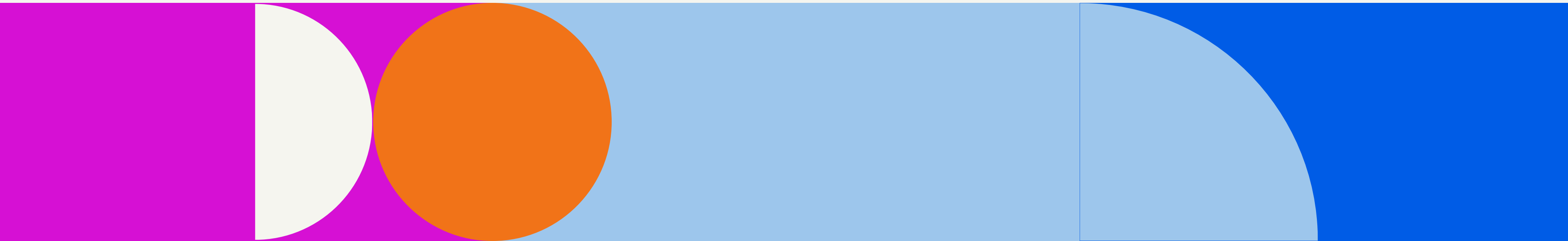
Secondary Prevention

ADJUSTING
CURRENT
APPROACHES



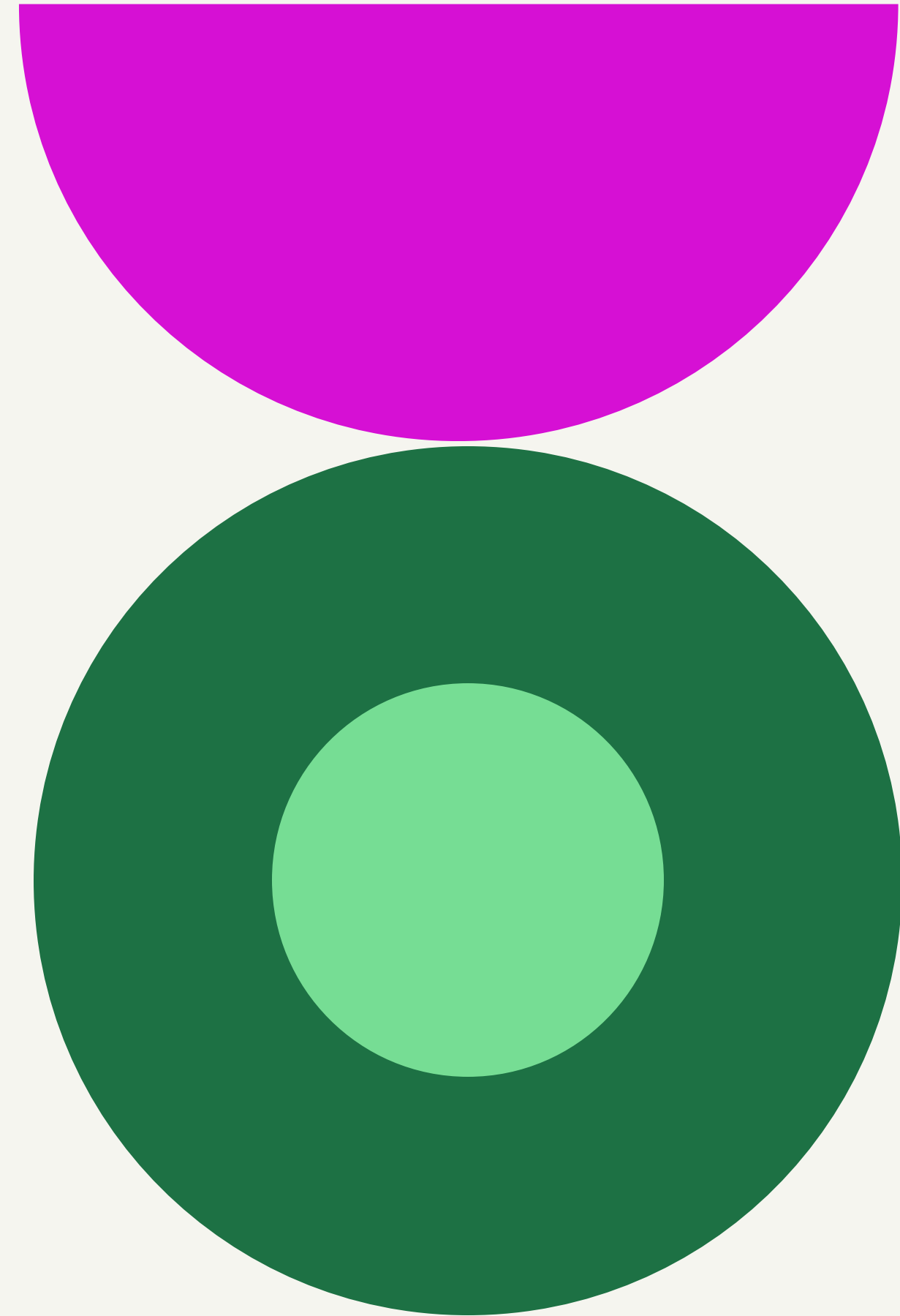
Social media guidance should focus on problematic use

- Social media is both positive and negative for teens
- It is most likely to be negative when it displaces growth-giving activities and/or exposes teens to toxic content



Secondary Prevention

RESEARCH
RECOMMENDATION



Research on social media harms should assess:

- The impact of exposure to hate content
- The effect on boys of being exposed to ultra-fit/ultra-lean body ideals

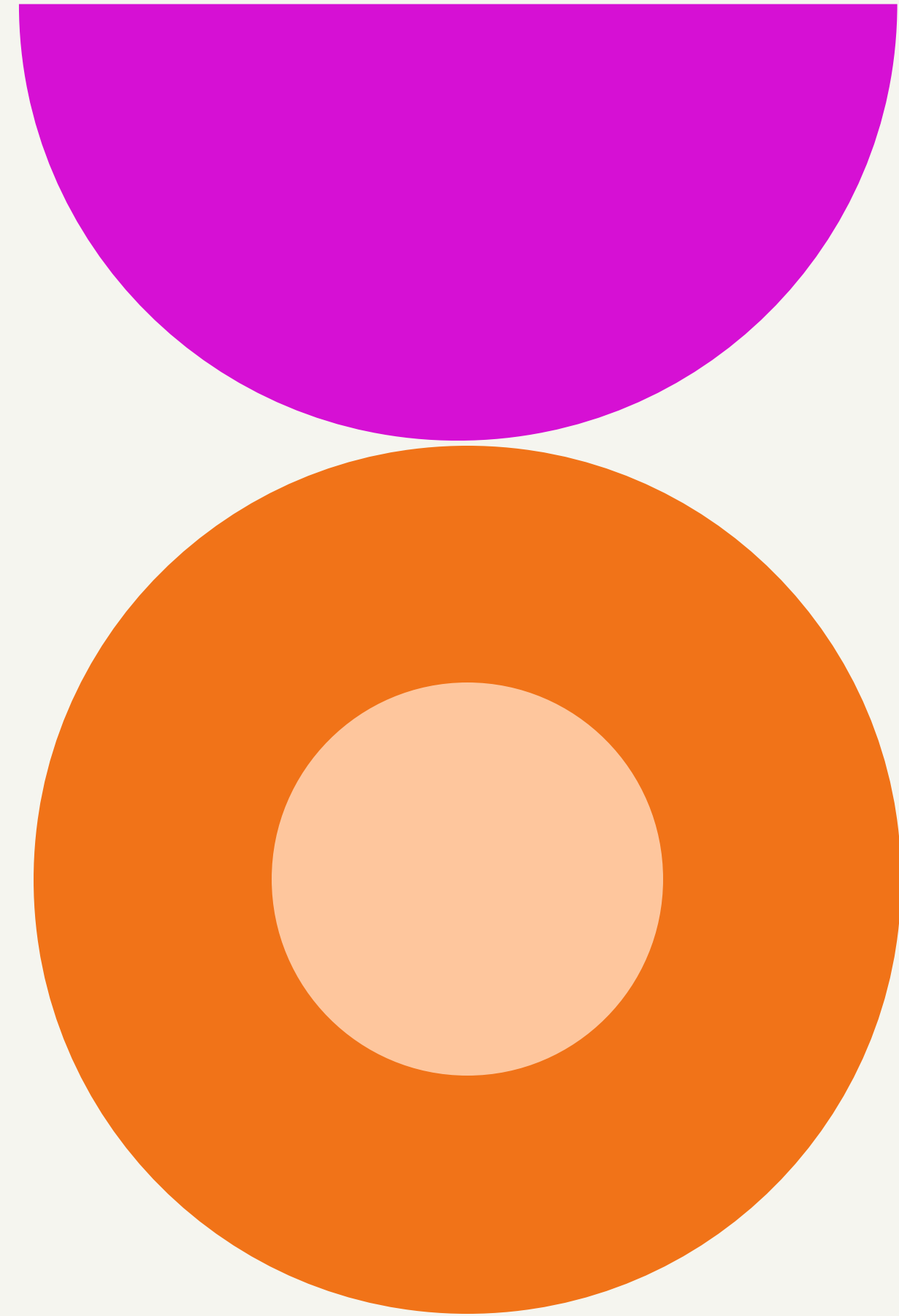




Tertiary Prevention

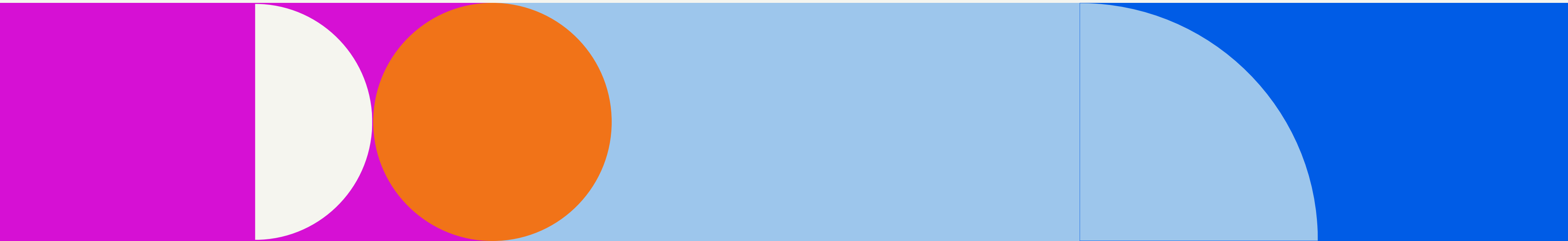
Tertiary Prevention

**ONE: BUILD THE
WORKFORCE OF
CLINICIANS WHO
ARE SKILLED AT
CARING FOR TEENS**



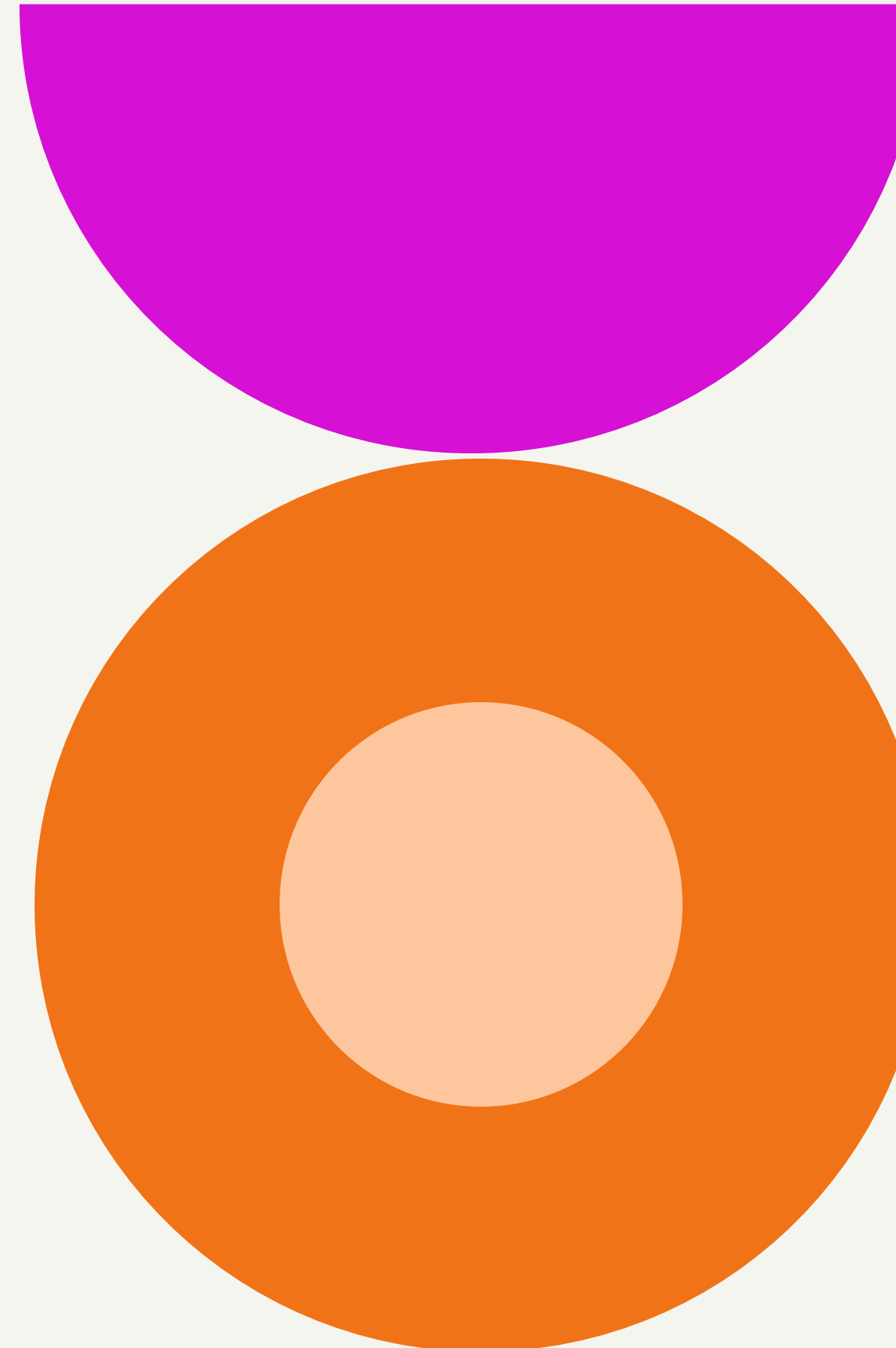
Effective care for teens requires specialized training in:

- Technique
- Assessment
- Working with the family system



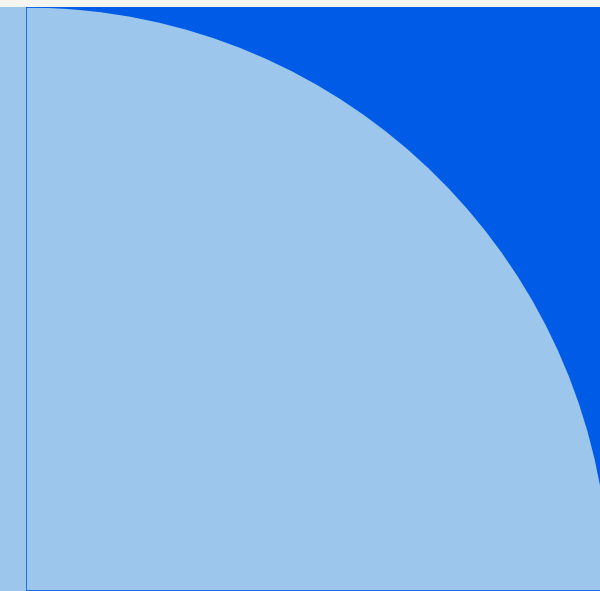
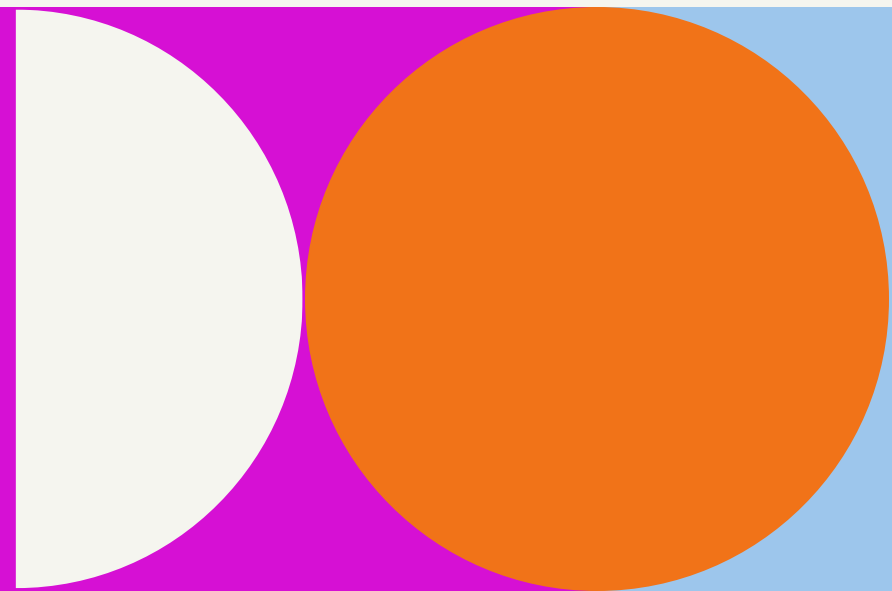
Tertiary Prevention

TWO: BUILD A DIVERSE CLINICAL WORKFORCE



To develop a more diverse clinical workforce we need to:

- Find ways to reconcile ethical principles and legal requirements
- Understand the pipeline (both feeders and holes) for diverse clinicians



TEENAGERS BELONG TO EVERYONE



Thank you!

QUESTIONS?

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