

# Mental Health in Teens



**The teenage years can be a rocky time for your child.** She'll face the hormonal and physical changes of puberty, as well as the challenging task of shaping her own identity. That task can be made even harder by additional pressures like academic, athletic or extracurricular commitments; self-image or self-esteem issues; or peer pressure to use alcohol, drugs or to have sex.

These stresses can take a toll on your child's mental health as she copes with school, friends and becoming her own person. She might become anxious, depressed or even suicidal. Learn the warning signs that your teen is struggling with negative thoughts or difficult situations, so you can take steps to get her the help she needs.

## Warning Signs

Your child's behavior can clue you in that she may be struggling with anxiety or depression. Watch out for signs that your child:

- **is doing poorly or worse in school**
- **loses interest in hanging out with friends**
- **drinks or does drugs**
- **has poor concentration or trouble focusing**
- **seems especially angry, guilty, sad or overwhelmed**
- **doesn't care about the future**
- **is very sad a lot of the time for no apparent reason**
- **has a major change in her weight or sleep patterns**
- **has thoughts about hurting herself**
- **has low self-esteem**

If you notice any of these warning signs, talk to your doctor. And see ideas on p. 2 for how you can help.

## Depression

If your teen is depressed, she might feel overwhelmed by negative, sad and unhappy feelings. Depression can be caused by many things like:

- **Major life events**—The upheaval from changing schools, divorce, or death of a loved one can impact your child's mental health.
- **Low self-esteem**—Self-esteem relates to how you feel about yourself as a person. How much—or how little—your child values herself can affect how she acts. A poor body image can also lead to having low self-esteem.
- **Home environment**—A violent, stressful or unhappy family life can weigh heavily on your child.
- **Problems at school**—Bullying, teasing by peers and poor school performance can negatively affect your child's self-esteem.
- **Substance abuse**—Drugs, including alcohol, cause changes in the brain that affect mood. Substance abuse can also lead to addiction and depression.

Depression also runs in families and teenage hormones can make mood swings worse. Untreated depression can lead to suicide, so keep an eye out for any of the warning signs listed above.



To learn more, visit  
**HealthyAdvice.com/  
TeenDepression**

You can also visit these  
websites:

- **KidsHealth**  
www.kidshealth.org
- **National Mental Health  
Information Center**  
www.mentalhealth.  
samhsa.gov

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## What You Can Do

Encourage your child to open up about his feelings to yourself or another trusted adult, and take the right steps to get the help he may need. Here are some tips to help your child:

- **Exercise.** Being active boosts mood, improves overall health and can help your child feel better about himself. Encourage activity by taking an after-dinner walk with your child or playing an active game with him like tennis.
- **Good nutrition and sleep.** Eating a well-balanced diet with fruits, vegetables and whole grains will help your child feel his best so he can tackle the stress of teenage life. Also, getting eight hours of sleep each night can help regulate his moods and keep him alert for the school day.
- **Journaling.** Encourage your child to write down what's bothering him to help get it off his chest, so it doesn't stay bottled up inside.
- **Treatment.** Talk to your doctor about medicines or counseling that can help your child cope with depression. Also, check to see if his school offers counseling services.

## Suicidal Thoughts

Sometimes your child may feel so overwhelmed by negative thoughts or feelings that his mind turns to thoughts of harming himself. In fact, suicide is the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds. Take warning signs like these seriously:

- **Giving away possessions to friends or siblings**
- **Saying things like "I'd be better off dead" or "I won't be a problem for you much longer"**

If you think your child is suicidal, call your doctor right away. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), a national hotline that can connect you with a crisis center close to you.

## Remember:

- Know the warning signs of depression and suicide.
- Talk to your child about what's happening at school and with his friends.
- Counseling, medicine and lifestyle changes can help your child feel better about himself.