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Know! The Importance of Screening

Each teen with depression may experience different symptoms, and it may be hard to determine what behavior changes are signs of depression. That's why depression and mental health screenings are important. Screenings usually take 5 minutes and can be part of a teen's yearly check-up. During a screening, the doctor will ask questions about the teens' feelings and behaviors and determine if treatment and follow-up are necessary. A screening is **not** a diagnosis but is a helpful way to understand the impacts that depression symptoms are having on your teen's life. ^{3,5,6} Mental Health America offers an [online screening](#) on its website that may be useful for determining whether your teen should seek help from a medical professional.



Know! To Take Teenage Depression Seriously

Common issues like peer pressure, academic expectations, and changing bodies can create a lot of ups and downs for teenagers. But for some, the lows are not just temporary feelings – they're symptoms of depression. Depression is a serious mental health problem that affects how people think, feel, and behave. In teens, depression can negatively impact social and academic functioning and have other serious consequences. Depression isn't something that can be overcome with willpower – it requires long-term treatment and support. Learn more about teen depression and your role as a caring adult with the following tips.^{1,2,3}

Know! What Signs to Look For

Depression can go unnoticed in teens because adults often expect teens to act moody or emotional. Young people may also struggle to understand and express their feelings, which may make it difficult for them to seek help. When caring adults know what to look for, they can identify symptoms of depression and take early action to help teens access care.

Signs of depression in teens may include:

- Changes in energy levels – being frequently tired and sluggish or tense and restless
- Changes in sleep patterns – sleeping a lot more or a lot less than normal
- Changes in appetite – eating a lot more or a lot less than normal
- Use of alcohol or other drugs
- Having a hard time concentrating – including an inability to sit still or forgetfulness
- Frequent unexplained physical complaints – such as headaches, body aches, or fatigue
- Social isolation – including relationship trouble or withdrawing from friends and activities
- Poor school performance or frequent absences
- Less attention to personal hygiene and appearance
- Irritability, angry outbursts, or risky behaviors
- Showing self-injury or other self-destructive behavior
- Talking about death or suicide or giving away important items
- Lasting feelings of sadness, hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or despair
- Loss of interest in usual activities or hobbies
- Low self-esteem or feelings of not being good enough
- Running away or threats of running away from home
- Sensitivity to failure or rejection ^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8}

Know! How to Support Teens Dealing with Depression

There are many things that caring adults can do to support teens in their lives who have been diagnosed with depression or are experiencing some symptoms of depression. Try using the following tips to help teens cope with the challenges of depression.

Start with compassionate questions

Depression is a difficult subject to discuss, and teens may not want to bring it up to adults in their lives. You can start a conversation by asking compassionate questions that acknowledge your teen's emotional state. For example, you might ask, "It seems that you've been really down lately. Is that true?" You might want to jump into problem-solving mode, but that can come across as critical rather than loving. Focus instead on trying to understand what they're feeling without judgment.⁹

Focus on your teen's strengths

Take time to notice and point out your teen's strengths and positive behaviors. Tell them that you are proud of them when you see them taking care of themselves, doing the dishes, interacting with friends and family, or doing other things that take effort. They'll probably appreciate you recognizing them for doing a good job, even if it's something that they are expected to do anyway.^{5,9}

Create a safe environment

Depression can increase a person's risk for suicide. Ensuring that your home is a safe environment can prevent self-harm and suicide. Follow [safe storage guidelines](#) for prescription and over-the-counter drugs, guns, and alcohol. You may also want to work with your teen to create a [safety plan](#).^{5,10}

Support healthy daily routines

Experiencing depression can make it harder to accomplish daily tasks and routines. Try giving gentle reminders to your teen to sleep, eat, exercise, and take their medicine. Also, consider giving your teen opportunities to participate in daily activities without being critical of them. Offer an invitation to join you in doing something that you were planning to do, but avoid lecturing them on what they "should" be doing.^{9,10}

Take depression seriously

While not every teen who experiences symptoms of depression will be diagnosed with depression or consider suicide, it's important to take any symptoms seriously. Connect with your teen's healthcare provider and local community services to access resources and treatment. Know that there are supports available to help your teen and to help you as you navigate your teen's care.^{5,8}

Superscript sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document

For additional Know! Prevention Tips for Everyone, scan the QR code:



Resources

[Am I Depressed? \(for Teens\) - Nemours KidsHealth](#)

[Know! to Discuss Suicide \(preventionactionalliance.org\)](#)

[How to Help a Depressed Teenager - Child Mind Institute](#)

[Take a Mental Health Test - Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\)](#)

[Lock To Live | Firearm and Medication Safe Storage Decision Aid \(lock2live.org\)](#)

[How to Create a Suicide Safety Plan \(verywellmind.com\)](#)

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