

Know! How to Fight Teen Depression

The holiday season is filled with peace and joy for many, yet sadness and despair for others, creating the perfect storm for the onset or worsening of depression.

As a parent or other caregiver, do you feel confident you would know if your child was experiencing depression? And if your child was, would you know what to do?

If you are questioning your ability to discern typical teen behavior from something more serious, you're not alone. According to the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health from the University of Michigan, 40% of parents surveyed said they feel they would have a hard time telling normal ups and downs from possible depression in their tweens and teens. In addition, 30% of parents were concerned with recognizing signs and symptoms of teen depression due to youth being good at hiding their feelings.

It is important to know that teen depression presents itself differently than adult depression in several ways. In the previous tip, Know! The Red Flags of Teen Depression, we provided tips for talking with your teen on the subject, and shared the signs and symptoms of depression, specific to teens, so that parents are better armed to recognize even subtle hints.

In this tip we focus on how parents and other caregivers can help teens who are, in fact, experiencing depression during the holiday season and beyond (with these tips from HelpGuide: Parent's Guide to Teen Depression):

Encourage Social Connection

- Make face-to-face time with your child a daily priority. When you do, be sure to put down YOUR phone, resist the urge to multitask, and give your complete attention to your child. This daily in-person interaction can go a long way in reducing your child's depression.
- Encourage your child to connect with friends. You can even take the lead by seeking out opportunities for them to connect with other teens through family events and activities.
- Get them re-engaged. It is common for depressed teens to lose interest in activities they used to enjoy. Help them find that spark again that brings them joy.
- Promote volunteerism by helping them find a cause that interests them and gives them a sense of purpose. Helping others is a great way to boost one's mood.

Make Physical Health a Priority

- Get your child moving; exercise is essential to mental health. Ideally, youth should be getting an hour of exercise each day. But it need not involve the gym. It could be a stroll around the block, a bike ride, walking the dog, etc. So long as they're moving, it's beneficial.
- Get them off their screens. Teens tend to gravitate toward the virtual world to escape their problems, but social media has a way of making things go from bad to worse. Plus, when screen time goes up, physical activity and time spent with friends in person goes down, which can worsen symptoms.
- Encourage plenty of sleep. Sleep is as vital as the air they breathe, and most teens aren't getting enough of it. Teens need between eight to ten hours of sleep each night in order to function their best.
- Provide them with nutritious, balanced meals to improve their mood and help them feel energized. The typical teen-preferred junk food is alright in moderation, but it is critical for brain health and mood support to incorporate healthy fats, quality proteins, and fruits and vegetables in their daily diets.

Know When to Seek Professional Help

- Family support and healthy lifestyle changes can make a world of difference for a teen experiencing depression. However, sometimes these measures are simply not enough. If you suspect or know that your child needs something more, do not hesitate in seeking professional assistance. Start with your family physician or pediatrician for direction and guidance.

For further depression support and referrals, contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline at 1-800-950-6264 or go online at **https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-HelpLine**.

If you suspect that a teenager is suicidal, take immediate action! For 24-hour suicide prevention and support in the U.S., call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-TALK**. To find a suicide helpline outside the U.S., visit **IASP** or **Suicide.org**.

Sources

- Melinda Smith, M.A., Lawrence Robinson, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. HelpGuide: Parent's Guide to

Teen Depression. October 2019.
- National Sleep Foundation: Children, Teens & Sleep.

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