

Know! The Red Flags of Teen Depression!

It's December; tis the season to be jolly. That's easier said than done for many people, adults and teens alike. All the hustle and bustle can worsen the symptoms of those who already suffer from anxiety and depression into. And for others, the holidays can create the perfect storm for the onset of symptoms.

Holiday parties, family gatherings, the overabundance of social media pics and posts, the loss of a loved one, divorce or other family separation, financial concerns, less sleep, indulging in unhealthy foods and drinks, are all contributing factors to people of all ages feeling overwhelmed, anxious and many times, depressed this time of the year.

For some teens, feeling depressed can cause them to withdraw and avoid social interactions, which oftentimes leads to further sadness and loneliness – a downward spiral that can easily spin out of control. These feelings, which may be more easily managed during other times of the year, may be intensified in the midst of the holiday season.

As parents and other caregivers of young people, it is vital to be aware of the many signs and symptoms of teen depression (according to HelpGuide: Parent's Guide to Teen Depression):

- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Sadness or hopelessness
- Tearfulness or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities
- Poor school performance

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide

When considering the red flags for depression, it is important to know that they may look very different in young people versus adults.

Irritability, anger, or hostility: The predominant mood in a depressed teen is oftentimes irritability, as opposed to sadness. It is common for a depressed youth to be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, or prone to angry outbursts.

Unexplained aches and pains: When a physical exam turns up zero answers to your child's chronic headaches, stomachaches and such, the cause may be due to depression.

Extreme sensitivity to criticism: It is common for young people who are depressed to experience feelings of worthlessness, which makes them even more vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure than their teenage peers.

Withdrawing from some, but not all people: Depressed teens typically maintain at least some friendships, while depressed adults tend to isolate themselves. Depressed youth, however, are known to socialize less, pull away from their parents, and start hanging out with a new crowd.

You are now aware of the many potential triggers of teen depression this time of the year. You are also aware of the signs and symptoms to look out for when it comes to youth who are depressed. Now it's time to start up a conversation with your child, as communication is key.

How you communicate is as important as **what** you communicate. When talking with your child, focus on listening, not lecturing. Be gentle but persistent, knowing that it can be extremely difficult for a teen to express having feelings of sadness and depression. Acknowledge their feelings, even if it seems silly or irrational to you. In the end, trust your gut. If your child won't open up to you, but you know there is something more going on, consider reaching out to a school counselor, teacher, or mental health professional. The essential piece is to get them talking.

Whether you question if there is a potential issue of depression or not, talking regularly with your son or daughter on topics such as this will help to build and foster a strong relationship between the two of you.

In the tip to follow, we will share information on how to help depressed teens navigate through the holiday season and beyond.

Sources

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

Teen Depression. October 2019.

- Jennifer Salerno, NP, Teen Depression and the Holidays. The Struggle is Real. October 2017.

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