

Parents' Guide to Teen Depression

The teenage years are difficult and young people face many pressures during this time. These range from puberty and body changes to understanding who they are and what they want in life. Put this together with pressures from school, friends and social media and it can potentially lead to turmoil, anxiety and depression. There is a difference, however, between the normal teenage issues and depression and it is important for parents to understand when to be concerned and seek help.

The good news is that depression is treatable and, with your support, your teenager can recover.



What's the Difference Between 'Teenage Blues' and Depression?

We all know that moodiness and acting out is not unusual with teens. But persistent changes in personality, mood, or behaviour could indicate that your teenager is struggling and may need your help. If you're unsure if your child is depressed or just "being a teenager," ask yourself the following questions:

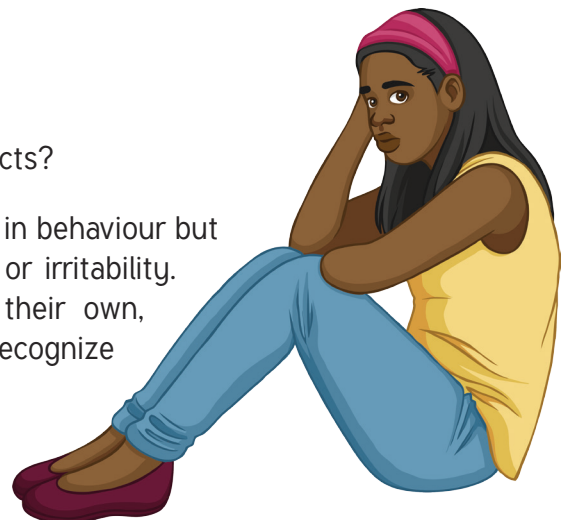
- What are your teenager's symptoms?
- How long the symptoms have been going on?
- How severe they are?
- Are they different from the way your teenager usually acts?

Hormones and stress can explain the occasional changes in behaviour but not continuous and long term unhappiness, exhaustion, or irritability. Unlike adults, who have the ability to seek help on their own, teenagers rely on parents, teachers, or other adults to recognize their behaviour and get them the help they need.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

If you have a teenager in your family, it's important to learn what teen depression looks like and what to do if you spot the warning signs.

1. sadness or hopelessness;
2. irritability, anger, or hostility;
3. tearfulness or frequent crying;
4. withdrawal from friends and family;
5. loss of interest in activities;
6. poor school performance;
7. changes in eating and sleeping habits;
8. restlessness and agitation;
9. feelings of worthlessness and guilt;
10. lack of enthusiasm and motivation;
11. fatigue or lack of energy;
12. difficulty concentrating;
13. unexplained aches and pains;
14. thoughts of death or suicide.



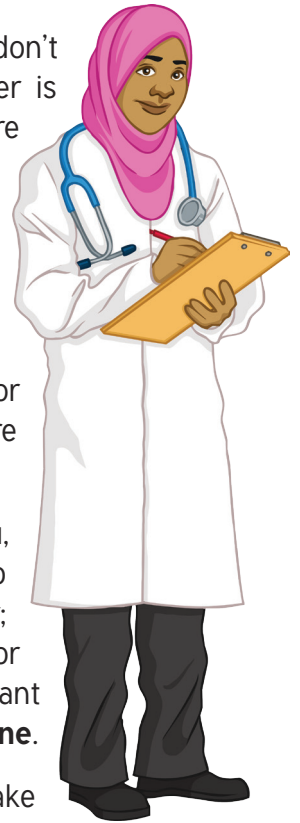
What to Do If You Think That Your Teenager Is Depressed

Don't ignore the problem. Depression is a serious condition when left untreated, so don't wait and hope that the symptoms will go away. If you suspect that your teenager is depressed, bring up your worries in a loving, non-judgmental way. Even if you're unsure that depression is the issue, the worrying behaviours and emotions you're seeing are signs of a problem that should be addressed.

Talk to your teenager and let them know what specific signs of depression you've noticed and why they worry you. Then ask them to try and share what he or she is going through—and be ready and willing to really listen. It isn't easy for someone with depression to talk about how they feel but if your teenager knows that you are there for them then they may open up. The most important thing is that they know that you are there for them and that you want to help.

If your teenager won't open up to you, consider encouraging them to talk to someone they trust – maybe their teacher; a pastoral member of staff at school or mental health professional. The important thing is to get them talking to **someone**.

If you are really concerned then make an appointment to see your GP – it may be that you need to see the doctor with your child or even talk to them before so that you can express your concerns.



Practical Tips to Support Your Teenager

- Watch for warning signs, including irritability and anger.
- Set aside quality time each day to talk face to face to your child.
- Focus on listening and being supportive – don't try to tell your teenager what they need to do. They need to feel listened to and understood.
- Encourage your teen to spend time with friends. Often someone with depression will become withdrawn and find it hard to socialise – try and get them socialising.
- Make sure he or she is eating healthily and getting plenty of sleep and exercise – often people with depression find it difficult to get going, but good sleep and exercise is essential for positive mental health.
- Learn more by reading blogs and articles online. You may find others who have the same experiences.

