



How do I know if a youth is feeling depressed?

Depression is different than everyday sadness in that it is a persistent feeling that lasts two or more weeks. One in 10 adolescents experience clinical depression each year. Fortunately, depression is a treatable mental illness with many effective treatments, such as therapy or medication. This handout provides a quick overview of depression in adolescents and resources for support.

Causes

There is no singular cause that leads to depression, but there are several factors to consider. For some, depressed mood is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Genetics also play a role, and depression can run in families. For others, environmental stressors can cause depression. Teens have a few unique stressors that can cause them to feel overwhelmed, such as:

- Experiencing added responsibilities at home and school with each passing year.
- Friendships, romantic relationships, and bullying can be difficult for those trying to fit in.
- Family transitions, such as divorce or siblings moving out, can be difficult to navigate for teens, who do not have control over these things.

The symptoms of depression in youth can vary, and depression does not look the same in everyone. It is important to be mindful of your youth's "normal" behaviors versus "not normal" behaviors. Some common signs of depression are when the following last for more than two weeks:

- A lasting feeling of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or guilt.
- Irritability, anger or aggression.
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide.
- Participating in self-injurious behaviors including, but not limited to: cutting, burning, or otherwise purposely hurting themselves.
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy.
- Fatigue and low energy.
- Persistent physical symptoms such as aches, pains, headaches, cramps or digestive issues.
- Changes in appetite and sleep: sleeping or eating too little or too much.
- Withdrawal from social activities, isolation from friends or family, or reduced ability to function during events.
- Difficulty concentrating, focusing, remembering information or making decisions.
- Low motivation for school, sports, the future, or life in general.
- Engaging in risky behaviors/activities, including an increase in alcohol or drug use, unsafe sexual behaviors, running away, shoplifting, property destruction.

How YOU can help

Having a teen with depression can be challenging and sometimes scary for parents/guardians. Here are some tips for having a conversation with your teen:

- Show you care! Listen carefully and be genuine; your youth has shared something very important with you. Be sure to stay approachable and open-minded.
- Avoid dismissing the feelings your youth expresses. Offer hope by listening, acknowledging and validating feelings.
- Ask questions while being direct, calm and non-confrontational. Remain empathetic with your tone.
- Ask for help! You are not alone, and there are many individuals within your community who can get your youth the support they need.

Who you can talk to if you are concerned

- Talk with school staff, including the school counselor, Principal, or Vice Principal about concerning behaviors.
- Seek help from a Psychologist, Therapist, or Social Worker.
- Consult with a Health Care Provider or child's Primary Care Physician.
- If someone is in crisis, do not leave them alone! Call the San Diego Access and Crisis Line 1 (888) 724-7240 or text "HOME" to the Crisis Text Line 741-741. Both resources are available 7 days a week/24 hours a day.
- If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, you can call 911 or your local Sheriff's Office and ask for PERT (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team). PERT provides clinical support to law enforcement and the community for calls involving persons having a mental health crisis.

REMEMBER: Tell the support person about the signs you've seen in your teen that are concerning. Be specific and detailed:

"My teen's stress has gone beyond what is normal and I am worried about them because..." (changes in behaviors, self-harm, thoughts of suicide, etc.)