

Teen Depression and Suicide



Adolescence is a period of major social, hormonal and emotional change. It is common for teens to be concerned with self-image and become sensitive to the slightest criticism. Some act out rebelliously against authority, including parents and teachers. Others experiment with risky behaviors, such as using illegal drugs and having unprotected sex.

With all of these changes going on amid the increasing pressures of family, friends, school and a future career, it is little wonder that some adolescents become seriously depressed and even suicidal.

Depression

If you believe that your teen may be depressed, it is important for you to notice any behaviors that may indicate so.

Warning signs include:

- A radical and otherwise unexplained personality change
- Consistently sleeping more than usual or sleeping very little
- Repeated attempts to run away
- Frequent and lengthy bouts of anger or violent behavior
- Chronic boredom
- Ongoing inability to concentrate, pay attention or think clearly
- Loss of interest in activities formerly enjoyed, such as sports or hobbies
- Self-punishing behaviors, such as bingeing on food, starving, self-mutilation, etc.
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Major fluctuation in performance at school

Fortunately, depression is a very treatable mental disorder. Experts have found that the combination of counseling and medication has a good track record of controlling depression in teens. Arrange for a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker to evaluate your teen.

Suicide

Each year, almost 5,000 young people kill themselves. Left untreated, a clinically depressed adolescent is much more susceptible to attempting suicide. Studies show that suicide attempts by teens are the result of long-standing problems. Triggered by a specific event or trauma, a depressed teen may view the situation in an exaggerated way, believing it will last forever. Built-up anger, resentment or fear that he or she has let people down can drive a teen to attempt suicide.

Talking with Your Teen

Some parents feel that by discussing the topic of suicide, they are putting thoughts into their teen's head. Chances are, if you suspect your teen is suicidal, he or she has already given it plenty of consideration. By discussing the subject in a frank and open manner, you are sending a clear message to your teen that you care about what he or she thinks and feels. Be sure to have a two-way discussion, not a lecture. Do more listening than talking.

"Inoculate" your teen against acting out when he or she fears that he or she has disappointed or let friends or family down. Let your teen know that although you expect him or her to obey limits, keep his or her grades up, not abuse drugs and not get arrested, the consequence for these actions is not suicide. Emphasize that if you are disappointed in something your teen has done, making mistakes is part of growing up, and you will still love him or her unconditionally.

Some parents dismiss talk of suicide as an idle threat or a ploy for attention. Even if a teenager were to attempt suicide merely for attention, there is a great risk that he or she may accidentally go too far and inadvertently kill him or herself. If a first attempt does not bring the desired attention, the next is likely to be more lethal.

There is a common myth that the more someone talks about committing suicide, the less likely he or she is to act on it. In fact, people who attempt suicide often drop subtle hints or openly discuss their plans with their peers or family. Treat the subject of suicide very seriously, and help your teen find the treatment he or she needs to change the way he or she feels.

Here when you need us.

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