



Recognizing Depression in Teenagers

Depression strikes teenagers far more often than most people think. Teenagers who experience depression are not just in a bad mood; occasional bad moods or acting out is to be expected. Depression is a very serious issue that impacts many aspects of teens' lives. It can destroy the very essence of a teenager's personality, causing an overwhelming sense of sadness, despair, or anger. Below are some helpful guidelines to assist parents in identifying possible depression in their teen. Parents should consider depression when the change in their child(ren) behavior lasts over two weeks and impacts :

Signs and Symptoms of Depression in Teens and Youth:

- Sadness and/or hopelessness
- Concern regarding decline in grades
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Irritability, anger and/or hostility
- Tearfulness and/or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Restlessness and/or agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and/or motivation
- Fatigue and/or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide
- Getting in trouble or exhibiting risky behaviors
- Statements of wanting to die

Effects of Teenage Depression:

The negative effects of teenage depression go far beyond a melancholy mood. Many rebellious and unhealthy behaviors or attitudes in teenagers are actually indications of depression. The following are some the ways in which teenagers act in an attempt to cope with their emotional pain:

- Depression causes low energy and concentration difficulties. At school, this may lead to poor attendance, a drop in grades, and/or frustration with schoolwork in a formerly good student.
- Your depressed teenager may run away from home or talk about running away. Such attempts are usually a cry for help.
- Your teenagers may use alcohol and/or drugs in an attempt to “self-medicate” their depression. Unfortunately, substance abuse only makes things worse.
- Depression can trigger and intensify feelings of ugliness, shame, failure, and/or unworthiness.
- Your teenagers may go online to escape their problems, but excessive computer use only increases their isolation, making them more depressed.
- Your depressed teenagers may engage in dangerous and/or high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving, out-of-control drinking, and unsafe sex.

The Difference between Teenage and Adult Depression

Depression in teenagers can look very different from depression in adults. The following symptoms of depression are more common in teenagers than adults:

- **Irritable or angry mood** – Irritability, rather than sadness, is often the leading mood in depressed teenagers. Your depressed teenager may be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, and/or prone to angry outbursts.
- **Unexplained aches and pains** – Depressed teenagers often complain about physical illnesses such as headaches or stomach aches. If a thorough physical exam does not reveal a medical cause, these aches and pains may indicate depression.
- **Extreme sensitivity to criticism** – Depressed teenagers are plagued by feelings of worthlessness, making them extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and/or failure. This is a particular problem for “over-achievers.”

Withdrawing from some, but not all people – While adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed, teenagers usually maintain at least some friendships. However, teenagers with depression may socialize less than before, pull away from their parents, and/or start hanging out with a different crowd.

For help, parents should talk to their child's school social worker or school counselor for support and/or a referral to a mental health professional. Services can be found through your insurance company or local community services board.

Adapted from Teen Depression: A Guide for Parents; http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_teen.htm