

Helping your teenager cope with depression

At a glance

- Life can be tough for teenagers, and many can suffer from depression – but with your help and support they can work through it.
- Signs of depression can be irritable or angry moods, unexplained aches and pains, self-criticism and bad or dangerous behaviour.
- To help your teenager, you can learn about depression, be patient and supportive, encourage them to see friends and get fit, and get the right treatment.



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Life can be tough for teenagers. They're coping with raging hormones, the social and emotional pressures of growing up, and demands of school. So it's no surprise that many parents find that their teenagers are moody and difficult at times. However, what may sometimes seem like a typical teenage mood, may actually be depression. If your teenager is often grumpy, this fact sheet will help you understand whether they may have depression, and how you can help them cope.



Signs of depression in teenagers

- **Irritable or angry moods** – You may think that a depressed person should seem sad, but depressed teenagers are more likely to be grumpy or hostile or have angry outbursts.
- **Unexplained aches and pains** – A teenager who is depressed may go to the school nurse more often or complain of vague problems, such as stomachaches or headaches.
- **Self-criticism** – Depressed teenagers may be consumed with feelings of worthlessness, rejection and failure.
- **Decline in school performance** – Depression may cause a lack of motivation or organisation that results in lower marks.
- **Risky behaviour** – Depressed teenagers may engage in unsafe sex, stealing, fighting, dangerous driving or substance use. Self-harm such as cutting, scratching, burning or excessive piercing or tattooing may also be a sign a teenager needs help.

If you think that your teenager may be depressed, take them to see their doctor. A doctor can rule out other conditions that may be causing the problems, or diagnose depression.

A doctor may diagnose depression if a teenager acts grumpy or depressed for at least two weeks and has four or more of the following symptoms:

- Sleep problems (usually sleeping too much)
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Loss of interest in friends
- Change in appetite or weight
- Lack of energy
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Acting restless or sluggish
- Thoughts of death or suicide



How depression is treated

Depression affects about one in five teenagers, and twice as many girls as boys. Some teenagers may gradually get better on their own, but many need help to work through their depression.

Just like adults, the main treatment for teenagers with depression is antidepressants or counselling (or both). If your teenager is prescribed antidepressants, make sure that you understand the risks and benefits of these medications before they start taking them. And once they do, it's important that they don't stop without talking to their doctor first – even if they are feeling much better – as sudden withdrawal from them can make symptoms worse.

Whatever treatment your teenager has, make sure that you watch them for any signs of changing mood. If you're worried that they're getting worse, speak to their doctor again. And if you are ever concerned that they may hurt themselves or commit suicide, get help immediately.



How you can help your teenager

Untreated depression can affect a young person's self-esteem and lead to destructive behaviour, including drug abuse and suicide. However, there's a lot that you can do to help:

- **Learn about depression** – Explain to your teenager that depression is an illness, and like other illnesses, it needs to be treated. Help the family understand what they are going through.
- **Be patient and supportive** – Understand that it will take some time for treatment to work.
- **Encourage your teenager to be active** – Exercise can help fight off depression.
- **Urge them get out and see friends** – Spending too much time alone is not good for emotional health.
- **Keep an eye on their mood** – Call your doctor if their depression seems to be getting worse instead of better.
- **Help them to get treatment** – Take them to their doctor, and make sure that they go to their counselling sessions and take any medicine prescribed.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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