

Adolescent Depression Awareness



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The teen years are hard. No doubt about it. There are lots of brain and body changes going on, as well as pressures about school, friends, social life, family, sports/activities, future plans, etc. Not to mention the never-ending stream of social media influences (and they're not always good!) that bombard their screens nowadays. The period between age 13-25 is when many mood disorders begin to appear, particularly in females.

So it's not unusual for teens to get the blues, feel down occasionally, and 'stressed out' when things aren't going how they would like. Those 'moody teenager' moments can be tough to deal with, and can cause loved ones to worry. But when a teens' moods and behavior disrupts their ability to function and cope with things on a day-to-day basis, it may indicate a more serious issue that needs addressed—adolescent depression. This is a serious problem that calls for prompt attention and appropriate treatment.

Risk factors such as a family history of depression, difficult life events and/or trauma, side effects from certain medications, and negative thought patterns can all contribute to depression. Some people with depression literally have too much or too little of certain brain chemicals.

These symptoms may indicate depression, especially when they last for more than a couple weeks:

- Poor performance in school
- Anger and rage
- Sadness and hopelessness
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Lack of energy or enthusiasm about things they typically enjoy
- Overreaction to criticism, restlessness, agitation
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness

- Poor self-esteem or guilt
- Substance use, risky sexual behaviors or other risk-taking behaviors
- Suicidal thoughts, actions, or sudden interest in death

An easy and confidential way to determine if someone may be experiencing depression is to take a quick mental health screening. It's not a diagnosis, but could be a helpful way of understanding if the symptoms are having enough of an impact that further help is needed from a doctor or other professional. A couple of free resources are

- <https://screening.mentalhealthamerica.net/screening-tools>
- <https://psychology-tools.com/test/kutcher-adolescent-depression-scale>
- <https://www.psycom.net/depression-test>

It is extremely important that depressed teens receive prompt, professional treatment.

Depression is serious and, if left untreated, can worsen to the point of becoming life-threatening. However, remember that few adolescents seek help on their own. They may feel embarrassed, ashamed, not understand what is happening, or simply not care. They may need encouragement from their friends and support from concerned adults to seek help and follow treatment recommendations. Talk to them. Caring support from trusted adults partnered with professional treatment can be vital in helping a teen get relief from their symptoms and back on track.