
When Your Teen Is Diagnosed with Depression

Being moody is normal for teens. But depression is more than just moodiness. It's a serious but treatable illness. If your teen has been diagnosed with depression, the sheet will help you support your teen.

What is depression?

Depression is a mood disorder. But it affects both mood and behavior. No one is exactly sure what causes depression. It's linked with changes in levels of certain chemicals in the brain. These chemicals affect the ability to feel pleasure. Depression may run in families. A teen may be more likely to be depressed if someone else in the family has had depression.

Depression is a serious illness, just like diabetes or heart disease. And like any serious illness, depression is not something a teen can just snap out of. Treatment is needed.

What are the symptoms of depression?

In teens, common signs and symptoms of depression can include any of these:

- Loss of interest in family, friends, or activities that they once enjoyed
- Talking about feeling hopeless or worthless
- Increase in reckless or risk-taking behavior
- Talk of suicide or death
- Drop in grades
- Being fearful, anxious, restless, or irritable
- A lot of crying
- Big changes in appetite or weight
- Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
- Having trouble remembering, thinking, or making decisions
- Angry or forceful behavior
- Drug or alcohol use
- Causing self-injury (cutting, burning, or bruising on purpose)

What's the next step?

After a diagnosis of depression in your teen, the next step is deciding how to treat it. If not treated, depression can cause many problems. It can lead to drug and alcohol abuse. It can lead to risk-taking behavior. It can make other mental health problems more likely. And it's a risk factor for suicide. But treatment can help. The healthcare provider may refer your

teen to a mental health provider. This provider can talk with you and your teen about the best ways to treat depression.

How is depression treated?

The 2 most common treatments for depression are medicines and talk therapy. Both can take a few weeks to start working. But both can work very well. They are often used together.

Medicines

Medicines for depression are called antidepressants. They are thought to affect the balance of some chemicals in the brain. This helps them return to normal levels. Medicine can help a lot. But finding the best one for your teen may take time.

If medicines are prescribed:

- Follow the instructions carefully. Let the healthcare provider know how your teen is doing. Tell them if you see any changes.
- Never let your teen take more, less, or stop a medicine on their own. Talk with the healthcare provider first.
- Never give your teen herbal medicines along with antidepressants. Ask the healthcare provider first.
- In some teens and young adults, antidepressants can cause increased thoughts of suicide. If this happens, talk with your teen's healthcare provider right away.
- Make sure your teen knows that it is unsafe to share the medicines with anyone.

Talk therapy

Talk therapy is done by talking with a counselor or other trained healthcare provider. There are different methods for talk therapy. But they all aim to help change thoughts and feelings about problems. Therapy is often done one-on-one. But it can be done in a group with other teens. It can also be done with other members of the family.

Managing devices and media

Technology is a regular part of school and life, so banning it is not helpful. Instead, think about ways to decrease your teen's risks.

- Check your teen's social media activity. Cyberbullying victims tend to have high levels of depression. They are likely to feel alone and helpless.
- Keep up-to-date on new social media apps. Talk with your teen about apps or websites they use. Check them out yourself.
- Work with your teen to agree on electronic media rules. Include a plan for what to do if they are bullied online.

Showing your support

Recovery from any illness takes time. Getting better from depression is no different. While your teen is recovering, here are ways to help them feel better:

- Let your teen know that depression is an illness that is not their fault.
- Change your schedule so you can spend quality time with your teen. Don't allow electronic devices during this time for either of you.
- Be patient. Your teen's behavior may be hard at times. But they are just trying to cope. Your support can make a huge difference.
- Keep in mind that helping your teen helps the whole family. Think about joining a support group for parents and siblings of teens who have depression. Your family healthcare provider and your teen's school counselor can give you a list of online and community resources.

Encourage your teen to:

- Talk with you and share their feelings
- Spend time with friends and loved ones
- Exercise regularly to help relieve symptoms of depression

Spotting suicide warning signs

Depression can fill your teen's head with thoughts so bad that killing themselves can seem like the only choice. If you are worried that your teen may be thinking about suicide, don't hesitate to ask your teen about it. Asking about suicide does NOT lead to suicide. Suicidal thoughts or actions are not a harmless bid for attention. They are a sign of extreme stress. They should not be ignored.

If your teen becomes more isolated, starts giving things away, suddenly acts very happy or relieved, or talks about suicide, get help right away! If you know someone who is talking about suicide and is able to carry it out: **Don't leave them alone.** Take action.

Call 988 in a crisis

If your teen is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, call or text 988. Do not leave them alone. When you call or text 988, you will be connected to trained crisis counselors at 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. An online chat option is at 988lifeline.org. 988 Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

When to call the healthcare provider

Call the healthcare provider if your teen:

- Has side effects from a medicine
- Has depression that gets worse
- Becomes very forceful or angry
- Shows signs or talks of hurting themselves

To learn more

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**, 988, 988lifeline.org
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**, 800-950-6264, www.nami.org
- **National Institute of Mental Health**, 866-615-6464, www.nimh.nih.gov
- **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**, 202-966-7300, www.aacap.org