

Could Your Teen Be Suffering From Depression?

from the American Counseling Association

For many families, having a teenager in the home can sometimes be a frustrating experience. Virtually every teen will have his or her moody moments. Sometimes teens will be withdrawn, almost impossible to talk to, or even openly hostile. It can be frustrating to parents, but sometimes that teenage behavior might indicate a real problem.

Of course, it isn't hard to understand why the typical teenage years can be difficult and sometimes out of control. There's the ongoing pressures of school, the always present conflicts of adolescent social life, the physical changes brought on by puberty and the conflicts associated with the normal developmental process of wanting to be more independent and adult.

Most teenagers handle such pressures with only occasional bouts of anxiety and moodiness, but there may be times when teens find themselves overwhelmed by all that's happening to them. The result can be a few days of your teen being more moody, irritable and withdrawn, or in some cases may turn into a more serious issue known as clinical depression.

It can be a condition that's difficult to recognize in a teenager. Teens tend to mask what they're feeling, especially from their parents. Instead of seeming sad, they may seem constantly bored, irritable and uncommunicative. They may engage in risky behaviors or withdraw from activities they once enjoyed.

While it takes a professional counselor or other mental health professional to diagnose clinical depression, there are signs that parents can look for. They can include prolonged sadness, being overly anxious, trouble concentrating, eating and sleeping problems, decreased energy, or excessive feelings of guilt or worthlessness. When several of these symptoms are present for more than a few days, it's time for a parent to take action.

Start by encouraging your teen to share feelings and thoughts. You want to listen without judging while also acknowledging the reality of what your teen is feeling. Parents must always take any references, threats or attempts by their teens at self-hurt or killing themselves seriously. Teen suicides are the third leading cause of death for young people.

If what you hear sounds serious, and if you've seen signs of depression for some time, seek professional help. It might be your teen's school counselor or an outside professional counselor specializing in adolescent and family issues. The right help can get your teen back to fully enjoying his or her adolescence.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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