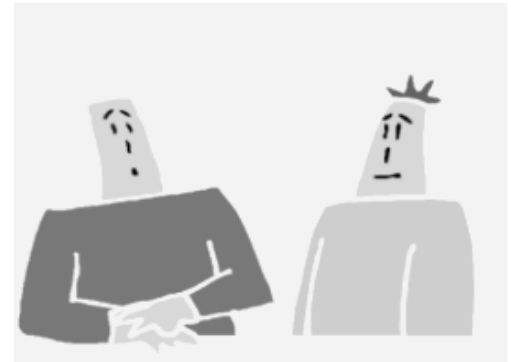




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# Living With Your Teen: Teen Depression and Suicide

It is often hard to know if teenagers are depressed. Many people believe all teens are moody. Sometimes teachers and parents ignore problems that show up. For example, teens may put themselves down. They may say that everything is boring and complain about everything you do or say. They're not interested in eating. These behaviors could just be signs of typical moodiness. They could also be signs of depression and a real problem.



## The warning signs of depression

- **Academic Signs**  
Student doesn't do well in school and can't explain why. Loses interest in school subjects. Doesn't try as hard or gives up more easily. Turns in unfinished or messy work. May complain of being too tired to finish work.
- **Social/Behavioral Signs**  
Teen may be very disruptive or show anti-social behavior, such as lying or stealing. Avoids people in general or withdraws from other teens. Behaves in ways that make it difficult to make friends or keep them. Afraid of certain things for no obvious or good reason. May be tired and constantly falling asleep; may act restless, take in appropriate risks.
- **Cognitive Signs**  
Teen may have trouble concentrating, remembering things or making decisions. Has very little or no confidence. Talks about suicidal thoughts or wanting to attempt suicide. Has constant thoughts about death.
- **Emotional Signs**  
Teen may have low self-esteem, feel guilty or just seem unhappy in general. May be irritable or complain a lot. Feels hopeless and helpless.
- **Physical Signs**  
Teen may show change in usual sleeping patterns. Complains about feeling sick, in pain or tired. Suddenly gains or loses weight or doesn't have the same appetite as before. Looks or acts "slowed down" or "speeded up".
- **Motivational Signs**  
Teen doesn't care about anything. Can't pay attention to things. Feels bored. Severe depression is often linked to suicidal behavior. Warning signs for depression and suicide may overlap. However, not all teens who commit suicide are seriously depressed. On the other hand, not all who are seriously depressed attempt suicide.

## **Signs of a possible suicide attempt**

Here is a list of possible warning signs of a suicide attempt. No one of these signs necessarily means a teen will attempt suicide. When some of these signs occur in combination, however, a teen may be contemplating suicide.

- A previous suicide attempt
- Writing poems or notes about death
- Speaking about suicide, even jokingly, or making comments like “I can’t take it anymore.”
- Verbal threats of self-destruction precede four out of five suicide deaths.
- Giving away or selling prized possessions and otherwise getting affairs in order.
- A radical personality change or signs of severe depression
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Running away from home
- Rebellious behavior that is sudden or severe
- Conflict with a girlfriend or boyfriend; trouble getting along with close peers or parents
- Bored, trouble concentrating, complaining of psychosomatic disorders like headaches or stomachaches
- A change in eating or sleeping habits
- An unusual increase in time spent alone in his or her room

## **What parents can do to help**

- Listen carefully to what your teen has to say. Don’t interrupt. Be supportive and accepting. Don’t criticize, judge or downplay his or her feelings or concerns.
- Ask questions about your teenager’s feelings. Ask if he or she has thoughts about suicide.
- Try to offer your help without suggesting your teen is emotionally or mentally disturbed.
- Tell your child that asking for help is not being weak. Stress that asking for help with a problem is a sign of maturity, mental health, and good judgment.
- Try to make your teenager feel comfortable about asking for help. It is best if your teen asks for help on his or her own. Suggest talking to a counselor or doctor, or calling a crisis hotline.
- If you believe your child is suicidal, do not leave him or her alone. Call a counselor, doctor, religious leader or police for help.

**Sources:** N.H. Division of Public Health

Whose Kids?...Our Kids! Teen Assessment Project. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

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