

Teen Mental Health



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Educate · Inspire · Grow

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PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION TOOLS FOR DEPRESSION



Symptoms of Depression in Adolescents

During the preteen and teen years, it can sometimes be difficult to know whether your child is dealing with a mental or behavioral health challenge such as depression, substance use or bullying, or if the changes in behavior you're seeing are simply a matter of your child going through a natural transition. However, it's important to [begin a conversation](#) to find out what is going on in order to know how to best help your child. It's especially important to

take note if several symptoms are occurring in combination, or are occurring over a prolonged period of time. Even if they're not dealing with a serious issue, taking the time to talk with them can still be incredibly beneficial.

... it's important to [begin a conversation](#) to find out what is going on in order to know how to best help your child.

Some of the most common signs and symptom of depression in adolescents can include the following:

EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- Feelings of hopelessness, emptiness, sadness, etc.
- Feelings of anger, irritation, or frustration even over minor situations
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Overreaction to failure or rejection
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Memory lapses
- Preoccupation with death or suicide
- Negative or pessimistic outlook on life and the future

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- Loss of interest in or lack of pleasure from favorite activities
- Disconnection from family and/or friends
- Increased conflict with family and/or friends
- Excessive fatigue
- Changes in sleep habits including insomnia or increase in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Increase in food cravings
- Using alcohol and/or drugs
- Decline in academic and/or athletic performance
- Increased isolation
- Excessive absences from school or other regular activities
- Changes in personal appearance and hygiene habits
- [Self-injury](#)
- Risky behavior, disruptive behavior, acting out
- Making a [suicide](#) plan



Sources of Depression in Adolescents

The cause of depression in adolescents can vary from one individual to another. There is no one single universal source of depression. However, some of the following factors can play a role.

Childhood Trauma

Traumatic events in childhood can impact an individual's brain in a way that makes them more likely to deal with depression. These events can include abuse, physical violence, sexual assault, severe accidents, war, natural disasters, death of a loved one, and witnessing violence. If an adolescent has experienced early childhood trauma, it's important that the treatment they receive for depression is [trauma informed](#).

Genetics

Depression is more common in individuals with blood relatives who deal with depression. If their parent or grandparent has gone through depression, a child can be at greater risk.

Brain Chemistry

Neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin play a major role in regulating mood. When neurotransmitters are imbalanced or deficient, depression can result.

Hormones

During the preteen and teen years especially, hormonal changes can affect mood and contribute to depression.

Learned Helplessness

Adolescent depression can be caused or aggravated by habits of negative or unhealthy thinking. When faced with challenges or difficulties, some youth will work to find a solution, whereas others will remain stuck in the problem, which can lead to depression.

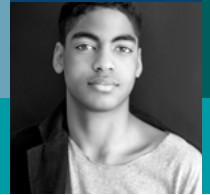
If an adolescent has experienced early childhood trauma, it's important that the treatment they receive for depression is trauma informed.



How to Help Adolescents Experiencing Depression

- Begin a conversation with them. Visit our ["Talking With Youth About Depression, Self-Injury or Suicide"](#) page for guidance.
- Create a [prevention and intervention plan](#) as a family.
- Visit our ["Treatment and Support Resources"](#) page to get connected to professional help.

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION TOOLS FOR SELF-INJURY



What is Self-Injury?

Self-injury, or self-harm is the act of inflicting injuries on one's own body. Forms of self injury can include cutting, burning, scratching, pulling out hair, carving words or symbols into the skin, piercing or puncturing skin with various objects, hitting oneself, intentionally hitting or slamming into walls or other hard objects, and picking at or intentionally interfering with injuries or wounds that are healing.



Why Do Young People Self-Injure?

The short answer is that self-injury is an attempt to cope. It is an unhealthy coping mechanism that individuals turn to when they haven't developed or fail to utilize healthy coping skills.

Some adolescents self-injure for the following reasons:

- To deal with, distract from, or feel relief from negative feelings
- To feel a sense of control when their life feels out of control
- To express or release emotions that they feel unable or embarrassed to express in another way
- To cope with overwhelming mental or emotional pain
- To feel alive or feel anything at all, as a relief from numbness

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What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Self-Injury?

- Cuts, scratches, burns or other injuries
- Scars
- An individual who claims to be accident prone in order to explain recurring injuries
- Wearing unseasonably warm clothing (long sleeves and long pants even in hot weather)
- Keeping a collection of sharp objects on hand
- Frequent blood stains on clothing, towels, tissues
- Impulsive or unstable behavior
- Difficulties with relationships
- Secretive behavior
- Expressing feelings of worthlessness

It is an unhealthy coping mechanism that individuals turn to when they haven't developed or fail to utilize healthy coping skills.

What Are the Dangers of Self-Injury?

- Becoming reliant on an unhealthy coping mechanism
- Decreased self-esteem and increased guilt and shame
- Failure to address, heal, or solve the underlying issues
- Wound infections
- Permanent scars
- Potentially dangerous or fatal wounds
- Increased risk for drug and alcohol use or suicide



How to Help Adolescents Who Are Self-Injuring

- Begin a conversation with them. Visit our [“Talking With Youth About Depression, Self-Injury or Suicide”](#) page for guidance.
- Create a [prevention and intervention plan](#) as a family.
- Visit our [“Treatment and Support Resources”](#) page to get connected to professional help.

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION TOOLS FOR SUICIDE



Warning Signs of Suicide

Direct Verbal Cues

A direct verbal cue is when an individual directly states their intent to attempt suicide. Examples:

- “I wish I was dead”
- “I want to die”
- “I want to kill myself”
- “I’m going to end it all”

Indirect Verbal Cues

Indirect verbal cues make no direct reference to death or suicide, but can be interpreted as a more covert reference to considering suicide. Examples:

- “I wish I could go to bed and never wake up”
- “I wish I was never born”
- “I can’t take it anymore”
- “I’m done with everything”

Behavioral Cues

Behavioral cues are distinct changes in behavior that may indicate that an individual is planning to attempt suicide. Examples:

- Giving away possessions
- No longer completing tasks such as homework or chores
- Writing letters that come across as “last goodbyes”
- Making amends
- Suddenly becoming very affectionate as if saying goodbye for the last time

Reassure them that you care about them and will do what is needed to help.



How to Help Adolescents Who Are Considering Suicide

- Take any mention of suicide seriously. Do not dismiss it as attention seeking.
- Reassure them that you care about them and will do what is needed to help.
- If they have the intent, the plan, and the means to attempt suicide, do not leave them unattended.
- Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255.
- Take them to a local behavioral health agency
- Use the behavioral health treatment locators on our [treatment and support resources](#) page to connect with a professional.
- Begin a conversation with them to find out what’s going on and what has brought them to this point.
- Consider using the suggestions on our [“Talking With Youth About Depression, Self-Injury, and Suicide”](#) page during your conversation.

TALKING WITH YOUTH ABOUT DEPRESSION, SELF-INJURY, OR SUICIDE



Start Early

As the old adage states, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Just as it’s important to start having conversations about physical health when our children are young, it’s equally crucial to begin talking about mental and emotional health.

The earlier and more consistently you include mental health in your discussions with your kids, the more normal the topic becomes to them, and the more comfortable they will be talking with you about it when they need to.



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Encourage Them to Speak Up

Let them know that you’re available and willing to listen. Make it clear that you will set aside time to be there for them, but know that you may need to

be the one to start the conversation sometimes. Make it clear that them coming to you with a problem is not an inconvenience.

Listen

Let them speak, and actively listen. Don’t worry about what you’re going to say in response. Don’t feel as if you need to solve all of their problems. You don’t, and realistically, you may not be able to solve all of them. What you can do, however, is listen and make it clear that they are being heard.

Pay attention to their non-verbal communication such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. Their non-verbals may tell you as much or more than their words do. Put your phone or other distractions away and focus on what they’re telling you.

Believe Them and Take Them Seriously

Don’t downplay their feelings or act as if their struggles aren’t real. Minimizing your teen’s thoughts or feelings will make them less likely to come to you with their problems, and may cause

them to withdraw or isolate instead of speaking up. If they make references to depression, self-injury, or suicide, take them seriously. Do not assume that they’re only doing it for attention.

Show Empathy and Validation

Make it clear that you acknowledge their feelings as their truth and their reality. Phrases like “I understand how difficult that must be for you” or “I can tell this situation is painful for you” can be very powerful in making it clear to your teen that they’re not alone and that you have

been listening. This will make them feel that you understand, which will make them more likely to open up to you. Reassure them that you care about them, support them, and will do what it takes to help them through the situation.

Be Self-Aware

Be conscious and cautious of your own reactions to what your kids tell you. They look to us for guidance and leadership. It’s important that we maintain control of our emotions around them. What they reveal to us may make us feel a variety of emotions, but it’s crucial that we maintain

control. Be aware of your own non-verbals such as tone of voice, volume, facial expressions, and body language. If you feel yourself beginning to lose control, it’s alright to take a moment to compose yourself.

Get Connected to Professional Help

As much as we can help our kids, it’s important to know when to get connected to professional help. Situations involving depression, self-injury, and suicide are serious and often require

guidance from a mental health professional. Use the behavioral health treatment locators on our [treatment and support resources](#) page to find help near you.



Situations involving depression, self-injury, and suicide are serious and often require guidance from a mental health professional.

CREATE A FAMILY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN FOR DEPRESSION, SELF-INJURY, AND SUICIDE



Use these guidelines to create your family's plan. Customize, modify, or edit the suggestions to meet your family's needs, principles, values, and living situation.

Be Consistent

- Discuss family guidelines with your spouse or partner, and come to an agreement before presenting the plan to your child.
- Make sure all adults involved in raising the child are on the same page, unified, and sharing a consistent message on mental health.
- Model the behavior you want to see in your child. As parents, our actions speak louder than our words.

Communicate

- Be intentional about talking with your child about mental health. Create regular opportunities for a two-way dialogue. They are likely to encounter numerous challenges during the adolescent years, therefore your conversation on the topic shouldn't just be a one-time talk.
- Make it clear to your child that mental health is an important topic and that you're comfortable talking about it, or having them approach you with the topic.
- Listen more than you speak. Let them express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. If they feel they are genuinely being heard, they will feel more comfortable opening up to you.
- Eat a meal as a family consistently at least five days a week. Research has shown that [regular family dinners](#) without electronic distractions can improve mental and behavioral health in youth. If family meals are not possible, set aside other regular time weekly to engage in an activity together that lends itself to open conversation and active listening.
- Answer your child's questions honestly at an age-appropriate level.



Promote Healthy Behaviors and Self-Care

- Teach your child strategies to handle stress in a positive manner
- Encourage your child to engage in healthy behaviors such as music, writing, art, sports, exercise, faith, helping others, etc.
- Support them in the activities that they enjoy
- [Read notMYkid's blog entry on helping stressed teens](#)
- Ensure that your child is getting sufficient sleep, exercise, nutrition, and time outdoors.
- Maintain healthy limits on electronic use or "screen time" by your child

Educate Yourself

- Research online. Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of [depression](#), [self-injury](#), and [suicidal ideation](#).
- Participate in a suicide prevention or intervention workshop such as [SafeTALK](#), [QPR](#), or [ASIST](#).

Deter

- Lock up and monitor alcohol, prescription drugs, over the counter medications, and weapons in your home.
- Restrict access to items that can be used to self-injure.

Monitor

- Pay attention to your child's behavior, words, and non-verbal communication
- Be conscious of your child's technology use and what they're reading, posting, and encountering on their phones and tablets.
- Get familiar with the apps and websites your teen uses.
- Consider the use of parental control and monitoring software such as [Bark](#). (Use code NOTMYKID for 30 days free)
- Check your child's room, vehicle, or backpack on a regular basis

Educate Your Community

- Educate your friends, family members, and other parents on strategies related to preventing and responding to depression, self-injury, and suicide
- Elicit the support of family, friends, coaches, religious leaders, community members, etc. to make youth mental health a priority.
- Encourage members of your community to create their own prevention and intervention plans as well



Get Connected

- If you discover that your child is struggling with depression, self-injury, or suicidal thoughts, get connected with a behavioral health professional or agency for guidance and assistance. You can contact notMYkid by texting the word "QUESTION" to our assistance line at (602) 584-8474. You'll be sent a form to fill out and a notMYkid staff member will contact you. You can also call notMYkid's office at (602) 652-0163. Note: The notMYkid numbers are not for immediate crisis intervention. If you are helping someone who is actively suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255
- Visit our [resource and support](#) page to find behavioral health resource locators, information on support groups, and other behavioral health assistance.

TREATMENT AND SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR DEPRESSION, SELF-INJURY, OR SUICIDE



Suicide Hotlines

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:](#)
(800) 273-8255 / (800) 273-TALK

[Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741 in the U.S. or Canada \(UK text 85258, Ireland text 50808\)](#)

Behavioral Health Treatment Locators

[SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment
Services Locator](#)

[SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357
or 1-800-487-4889 \(TDD\)](#)

Podcast Episodes on Suicide Prevention and Intervention

[Win This Year Podcast – "National Suicide
Prevention Week: Paolla Jordan and
Joronda Montañaño"](#)

[Win This Year Podcast – "How to Help Kids
Through Stressful Times"](#)

Trainings on Suicide Prevention and Intervention

[LivingWorks – Start, SafeTALK, ASIST,
and Suicide to Hope](#)

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