

**Teenage Mood Swings
or Something More?
Identifying, Managing, and Protecting
Against Depression in Teens**

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Agenda

- Depression overview
- Differentiating between typical teen behavior and 9 signs of depression
- Causes and perpetuating factors in depression
- Ways parents can help
- Seeking help from a professional

What is Depression?

- Depression is an **illness**
- Depression is a **pattern** of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
- Depression is **NOT** "feeling sorry for yourself", "a choice" or, "weakness"
- Depression is **under-identified** and **treatable**

Typical or Depression?

Rules of Thumb

- **Intensity** – Does this seem problematic? Is this a change for my child?
- **Duration** – How long has this been going on? Have these symptoms been present for two weeks or longer?
- **Context** – Does the symptom occur in isolation or in the presence of other symptoms of depression?
- **Difficulty Functioning** – Is this causing distress? Is my child struggling at school, home, and in relationships? Are they still fulfilling obligations, but does it seem to take considerably more effort?

Typical Adolescent Emotional Development

- Increased emotional reactivity
- Imbalances in development of brain systems
- Some moodiness, sadness, irritability, feeling overwhelmed for short periods of time
- Moodiness particularly in response to a stressor; also resolves reasonably after stressor resolves

1. Sadness / Irritability

- Does not have to be sadness! Irritability is more common in children and teens. Think of this as the **presence of negative mood**.
- Look for irritability, low frustration tolerance, sadness, tearfulness, hopelessness, emptiness present most of the time
- Teens more likely to say they feel “down” or “stressed”
- May have frequent nonspecific physical complaints

2. Anhedonia

- Loss of interest in most activities or the inability to feel pleasure while doing activities. Think of this as the **absence of positive mood**.

Typical

- Occasional complaints of boredom
- Losing interest in one activity but replacing it with another
- Preference to be with friends over family

Cause for Concern

- Not getting out of bed
- Not replacing lost activities with new activities
- Withdrawal from friends and family

3. Guilt / Worthlessness

Typical

- “Imaginary audience”
- Increased self-consciousness
- Developing skills in perspective-taking

Cause for Concern

- Excessive guilt over mistakes and shortcomings
- Chronic negative view of self
- Blaming self for events outside of their control
- “I’m worthless” “I’m a burden”

4. Difficulty Concentrating

Typical

- Some difficulty making big decisions
- Asking for input from parents and teachers with big decisions
- Some procrastination as taking more responsibility for school work

Cause for Concern

- Unable to make decisions
- Consistent difficulty concentrating at school or home
- Forgetful
- Tasks requiring concentration take noticeably longer

5. Sleep Changes

Typical

- Sleep cycle shifts later
 - "Night owls"
 - Sleeping later on weekends
- Reluctance to get up early for school
- Teens need 8 - 10 hours of sleep per night

Cause for Concern

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking in the night and unable to go back to sleep
- Waking earlier than anticipated and cannot go back to sleep
- Sleeps more than recommended and still tired

6. Appetite Changes

Typical

- Increased awareness of body image
- Efforts to eat healthier
- Increased appetite during growth spurts or busy sports seasons
- Gradual weight gain commensurate with height

Cause for Concern

- Markedly decreased or increased appetite
- Rapid weight gain / loss
- Forcing self to eat
- Eating one meal a day
- Overeating
- Increased appetite for certain types of foods

7. Fatigue / Low Energy

Typical

- Tired when not getting enough sleep or during a growth spurt
- Having lower energy and wanting to relax on the weekends especially after a hard week

Cause for Concern

- Low energy despite a healthy amount of sleep
- Tasks take more energy and effort than previously

8. Psychomotor Changes

- An observable change in body movement and thinking
- Many times, this is a later sign of depression
- Slowed down
 - Reacting slowly
 - Slowed speech
 - Decreased amount of speech
- Agitation
 - Feeling restless
 - Inability to sit still
 - Pacing, fidgeting, wringing hands

9. Thoughts of Death or Suicide

- Surprisingly common but not typical. 18% of high schoolers seriously consider suicide each year.
- Wide range in severity



- Warning signs
 - Talking about death
 - Hopelessness
 - Isolation
 - Belief that they are burden to others

9. Thoughts of Death or Suicide

- What you can do:
 - Always take suicide talk seriously and get help when needed
 - Stay calm and nonjudgmental
 - Know that asking about suicide does not give someone the idea
 - Restrict access to dangerous items at home

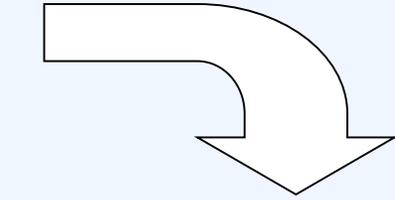
Contributors to Depression

- Never just one cause. Rather, depression is due to a **combination** of biological, psychological, and social factors.
- Estimated 40% is due to heritability
- Stress, especially interpersonal stress, is consistently linked with onset and maintenance of depression

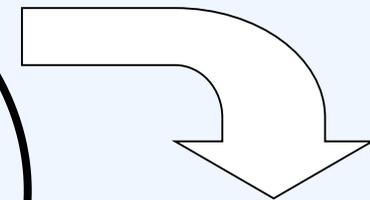


The Downward Spiral of Depression

Stressors
School/Work Problems
Problems with Friends
Family Problems
Medical Illness
Losses



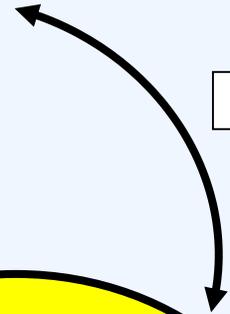
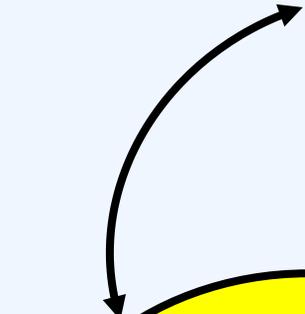
Feelings
Sad
Crabby
Don't enjoy anything
Bored



Behaviors
Withdrawal
Decreased activity
Irritable with others

Thoughts
Negative thoughts
Low self-esteem
Pessimistic
Hopeless

Physical Problems
Sleep Changes
Appetite Changes
Difficulty Concentrating
Lack of Energy
Slowed Down / Agitated



Communication Strategies

- Listen **without judgment** and show you understand
- Ask how you can best support them instead of automatically trying to solve the problem

Supporting a Teen's Healthy Behaviors

- Offer, but don't force, regular opportunities for activities that bring a sense of pleasure, mastery, and/or are in line with your teen's values.
- Help your teen manage stress. Give them permission to take a break!

Supporting a Teen's Healthy Thoughts

- Recognize their specific role in successes. Focus on strategies, efforts, and choices.
- When things don't go well, help widen the lens.
- Avoid empty optimism. Back it up with facts and evidence! How do I know that's true?

Seeking Help from a Professional

- Effective treatments for depression
 - Individual talk therapy
 - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - Interpersonal Therapy
 - Medication
- Who to ask
 - Pediatrician
 - Therapist
 - Psychiatrist
 - School Counselor