



Teen Depression: When Should You Seek Help?

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AS MANY AS ONE IN EIGHT TEENAGERS MAY HAVE DEPRESSION, according to KidsHealth.org. As a parent, it is important to know how to spot depression and when it's time to seek professional help for your child.

"Depression is pervasive," said Brenda Flesch, a licensed clinical professional counselor at Memorial Counseling Associates in Springfield. "It affects every aspect of the person: emotional, physical, spiritual, social, interpersonal and daily functioning."

While each age during the teenage years has its own emotional and developmental challenges, parents who are concerned about depression should look for a persistent change that *progressively worsens* in their teen.

"Parents should ask themselves 'What's different about my child?' They usually say, 'He's just not himself.'" Flesch said. "Depression is not just being sad. Sadness is brief and goes away. Depressive symptoms usually evolve over time and are present and persistent for at least two weeks."

If you think your teenager is depressed, Flesch recommends talking to your child as he or she may not even be aware of the change in their mood and behaviors.

"Talk about the list of depressive symptoms, focus on quality of life and overcoming obstacles in order to function," she said. "Sometimes you might want to include a school counselor or another

adult your teenager trusts, such as a relative, teacher or spiritual leader.”

The first professional contact a parent should make is to the child’s pediatrician or primary care provider to rule out any medical issues. After that, you may want to arrange for professional counseling for your teen. Be sure to check with your employee assistance program about the services available for family members.

If your teen makes any threat of committing suicide, take them immediately to the nearest hospital’s emergency department.

Besides seeking professional help for your teen, parents should encourage their child to pursue physical and social activities, be involved in the child’s treatment and learn about depression.

Depression is not just being sad. It evolves over time and is persistent.

“Parents need to understand that the symptoms of the biological disorder known as depression are not choices to be defiant, irritable, lazy, in a bad mood or just a teenage thing,” Flesch said. “Depression is not a character flaw or weakness; it is not just being interested in either the Goth or Emo subculture.”

It is also important for parents to remember what it was like to be a teenager and all of the normal struggles involved in growing up.

“Most healthy adults I know don’t want to repeat that time of their lives because of all of the internal chaos and changes,” Flesch said.

Memorial Counseling Associates (MCA) has therapists who take referrals for a variety of issues, including depression, grief, anxiety and stress, marital and family relationship issues, child or adolescent issues, chronic pain or medical concerns, and perinatal depression and other women’s health issues. MCA offers flexible office hours and has locations in Lincoln, Springfield and Jacksonville. For more information, visit www.MemorialCounselingAssociates.org or call 788-4065.

Causes of teen depression

- Family history of depression
- Significant changes (death, divorce, moving, natural trauma)
- Substance abuse
- Inconsistent and unpredictable home/family life
- Chronic stress
- Certain medical conditions (hypothyroidism, juvenile diabetes)

Signs of teen depression

- Change in sleep pattern
- Increase or decrease of appetite
- Increased irritability with immediate family and then with friends
- Tearfulness, sad, angry
- Withdrawal from family, friends and usual activities that bring pleasure
- Changes in appearance/hygiene
- Change in school work/performance
- Skipping school, disruptive behaviors at school
- Inability to concentrate/focus
- Statements of worthlessness, guilt, negative self talk, such as “I’m ugly, bad, stupid” etc.
- Physical complaints, including headaches, body aches and pains, low energy
- Changes to group of friends
- Alcohol and/or drug use