

## How to prevent depression and clinical anxiety in your teenager

### Strategies for parents

There is a range of factors that influence whether or not a teenager develops depression or clinical anxiety, including a few which parents have some control over. This means there are things you can do to help reduce your teenager's risk of developing these problems. The last edition of the Bulletin shared information on depression and clinical anxiety, and outlined the first practical parenting strategies as recommended by Beyond Blue. Below outlines some more suggestions.

#### Strategy 3

##### Establish family rules and consequences

- **Establish family rules and consequences** – if clear rules are established from an early age, your child is more likely to accept the rules than if they are established for the first time when they are older. Adjust rules for your teenager's behaviour over time to support and encourage autonomy.

Involve your teenager in developing rules for them to follow. Keep them to just a few and explain the reasons behind them. Although it may not seem like it, your teenager appreciates having clear rules to follow. Lastly, follow rules and laws yourself in order to be a good role model

- **Establish consequences** - Be consistent in maintaining rules and applying consequences for your teenager. Uphold rules, even though at times this may make you unpopular. When applying consequences for inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, focus on educating your teenager about why their behaviour was wrong. Do not use negative consequences that cause your teenager to feel humiliated.

Provide your teenager with positive consequences when they behave well. Use a variety of positive consequences, including praise, attention and privileges. Notice when your teenager does what is expected of them and praise and thank them for it.

#### Strategy 4

##### Minimise conflict in the home

- **Minimise conflict with your teenager** - While it may not be possible to avoid conflict with your teenager completely, try to keep it to a minimum and use positive approaches where possible. You can minimise conflict by considering which issues are minor irritations and can be ignored, and which are necessary for your teenager's safety and wellbeing. Wherever possible, try to resolve conflicts with your teenager constructively by problem solving together. You should not verbally abuse your teenager, use put downs or show them a lack of consideration.

If you do experience an extended period of high conflict with your teenager, continue to show them affection and try to keep having normal everyday conversations with them. Even if they shut you

out, continue to let them know that you are there for them. Teenagers are constantly seeking their parents' love and approval, even when it's not obvious.

- **Avoid criticizing your teenager** – Repeatedly criticising a young person increases their risk of developing depression and clinical anxiety. Rather than criticising your teenager in a personal way (e.g. “You are so lazy and spoilt.”), comment specifically about their actions (e.g. “You put in the effort for sport, but what about your studies? You need to balance your time better.”). You should encourage your teenager to think of their specific actions as good or bad, rather than considering themselves to be a good or a bad person. If you notice that you *are* criticising your teenager in a personal way or you lose your temper with your teenager, you should acknowledge it and apologise to them.

It's worth reflecting on how you yourself were treated by your parents, as this can influence how you now treat your own child. For example, if you were heavily criticised by your parents, you may not be aware of how critical you are of your own child.

- **Be a good role model for handling conflict** - Dealing with conflict effectively in front of your teenager helps them to learn that although conflict is inevitable, it can be dealt with effectively. Never use physical aggression in front of your teenager, such as throwing things or slamming doors. When you have a heated argument with another family member, try to model anger control by slowing down and taking time to calm down.
- **Minimise conflict with your partner** - Frequent and intense conflict between parents increases a teenager's risk of developing depression and clinical anxiety. On the other hand, avoiding conflict altogether is not helpful either. If you do have conflict with your partner, do not ask your teenager to choose sides. Also, you should not criticise your partner in a personal way (saying things like “Your father will always be good for nothing” or “Your mother is so selfish”), but only in terms of things that they do (e.g. “Your father is so grouchy when he is working too hard” or “I get mad at your mother when she takes this long”).

## Strategy 5

### Encourage supportive relationships

Having good social skills and supportive relationships with a range of people of different ages reduces a young person's risk of developing depression and clinical anxiety. Encourage your teenager to spend time with their friends and to do kind things for others.

Help your teenager develop good social skills by exposing them to an increasing range of social situations that are in line with their level of development. Talk through any social difficulties that they may have.

**Keep an eye out in the next Bulletin for more practical parenting strategies**