

How to prevent depression and clinical anxiety in your teenager

Strategies for parents

The last 3 Bulletins outlined Beyond Blue recommended parenting strategies to prevent anxiety and depression in your teen. The below information will give you some help with distinguishing between normal adolescent behaviour versus depression and clinical anxiety and where to get help!

Encourage professional help seeking when needed

If you notice a sudden, persistent change in your teenager's mood or behaviour, encourage them to talk about what is on their mind and really listen to what they are saying. Try to ascertain whether their low mood is due to a specific, temporary situation, or due to a more serious, persistent problem. When problems do persist, it is important to seek help from a trained mental health professional.

NORMAL ADOLESCENT CHANGES VERSUS DEPRESSION AND CLINICAL ANXIETY

During adolescence a lot of changes are occurring in a person's emotions, thinking and behaviour, as the brain is still developing. This can make it difficult to know whether a change is due to depression or clinical anxiety, or is part of normal adolescent development. For example, during adolescence, people experience stronger emotions, and are more inclined to take risks, be impulsive, and seek out new experiences. The best way to tell whether a change is normal or not, is to look at its effects on the adolescent's functioning. If they are having problems with school or work, are cutting themselves off from family and friends, or stop doing things that they used to enjoy, then there is reason for concern. Know what help is available and use it.

SELF-HELP STRATEGIES

Encourage your teenager to:

- engage in exercise or physical activity (e.g. sport, walking, gardening)
- do something they enjoy
- practise good sleep hygiene
- try to remain involved in purposeful activities for at least a small part of every day
- eat a healthy, balanced diet
- talk over problems or feelings with someone who is supportive and caring
- reward themselves for reaching a small goal
- let their family and friends know how they are feeling so that people close to them are aware of what they are going through

- engage in activities that give them a feeling of achievement
- enlist a trusted friend or relative to help them get out and about or do activities
- make sure they get out of the house and are active for at least a short time each day
- make a list of strategies that have worked in the past for depression and use them
- learn relaxation methods (e.g. progressive muscle relaxation training).

Seek help for clinical anxiety

Clinical anxiety is highly treatable. Seek help and advice from a trained mental health professional for your teenager if:

- your attempts to reduce your teenager's anxiety don't work
- your teenager experiences symptoms of anxiety for longer than six months
- anxiety symptoms begin to take over your teenager's life and limit their activities.

Seek help yourself when needed

If you think that you may be depressed or have clinical anxiety, set a good example for your teenager by seeking help from a health professional. Getting treatment may not only help you but also your teenager, because children of parents who experience depression and clinical anxiety are at an increased risk themselves.

Where to get help: Resources for parents

Parenting Strategies: Protecting Your Child's Mental Health

www.parentingstrategies.net

Learn some parenting tips to protect your child from mental health problems, and get personalised feedback on your current parenting around these issues.

eheadspace

www.eheadspace.org.au

1800 650 890

A confidential, free and secure space where young people 12 to 25 or their family can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional.

Parentline

A confidential telephone counselling service providing professional counselling and support for parents and those who care for children. The aim of Parentline is to nurture and support positive,

caring relationships between parents, children, teenagers and significant other people who are important to the wellbeing of families.

Parentline QLD & NT

www.parentline.com.au

1300 30 1300 (cost of a local call)

8am to 10pm, seven days a week