Recognizing and Addressing Depression in Teens

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Depression in Teens

Parenting a child is full of challenges. As your child grows, the challenges change and develop, from potty training to learning to drive. Many parents cite the teenage years as the most difficult to get through. It seems the opportunities for teens to get into trouble are never ending.

These opportunities can be compounded if you teenager has symptoms of depression. Due to a number of biological and environmental factors, depression in teens is relatively common – adolescence is a time when symptoms of depression often present themselves for the first time. Whether the symptoms are changes in sleep, appetite, mood or interest in activities, you must take these signs seriously and act responsibly. Your child's first experience with mental health issues will shape future experiences.

Addressing your teenager's depression seems scary at first, but keeping in mind a few simple guidelines will make the process more comfortable and productive for you both. Here's how:

Act With Love

The position or stance you take early in the process will set the tone for later. If you are harsh, judgmental or accusatory of your teenager, they will pull away. Consider the best approach to take given the situation – an approach based on love, understanding and acceptance will benefit you and your teen the most. Be your child's teammate and advocate even if they are behaving in ways that you do not appreciate or approve.

Learn the Facts

Childhood, adolescent and adult depression look very differently from each other. Depression in teenagers is more likely to be marked by irritability and agitation rather than by prolonged periods of sadness. Teenage boys with depression are much more likely to express negative feelings through anger and defiance. Accurately identifying and addressing these symptoms is difficult since the rate at which teenagers' bodies change makes some of these experiences typical or look like other issues. Every teenager has periods of sadness, frustration and conflict. Consult trusted online sources, other parents and mental health professionals to gather information.

Understand Their Experience

Work to open an honest path of communication with your teen. Understand their struggles, hopes and goals. If your current style of communication is not working, be open to trying something else. Teenagers, like most people, seek out attention. Be sure that your attention is positive. As mentioned, the majority of teens have issues with mood, energy, irritability, or concentration. Learn more about the impact these symptoms have on their life.

Offer Options

If your teen’s school, work or relationships are being negatively affected by symptoms of depression, offering options and suggestions can be a helpful tool. Discuss ways to limit frustration, sadness and periods of inattention. Provide ways to boost self-esteem and self-acceptance that have worked for you. Share music, movies, books or TV shows that your teen can relate to, or that give positive messages about dealing with depression.

Know When to Call the Professionals

Being there for your teen is great. But trying to be your teen’s therapist is not. Practicing good boundaries will benefit you both in the future. If your teen’s symptoms seem to be intense, long-lasting or are significantly impacting their life in negative ways, talk to a doctor and consider therapy or an evaluation with a psychiatrist. If your child ever talks about suicidal ideation or plans, take appropriate steps to keep them safe.

Conclusion

Hardship is part of being a teenager, but depression doesn’t have to be. If you have noticed changes in your teenager, following these tips will allow you to assess and manage the situation to the best of your abilities. If you work as a team, you’re more likely to come out with the win.