

Parenting Your Teen with Depression

Depression is more than a sad mood or feeling bad after something difficult happens. Be patient with your teen.

What is depression?

While rare in young children, depression may occur in up to 1 in 5 teenagers. Signs of depression may include:

- Feeling sad or irritable every day
- Loss of pleasure with activities they used to enjoy
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of appetite or eating too much
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling unusually guilty
- Appearing very slowed down
- Thoughts of death or suicide

How you can help your teen

- Get professional assessment and treatment, which may include medication and therapy.
- Listen. Avoid judgment or argument. Find time to listen to your teen, maybe while taking a walk or a drive.
- Encourage activity and small goals. Your teen may prefer to stay in bed, avoid activities, and have minimal motivation for social interaction. Gently but firmly encourage them to maintain elements of a regular schedule including bathing, time outside, and meals with family.
- Address irritability. Accept the feeling but not the behavior. Depression can appear in the form of irritability rather than sadness. Your teen's irritable behavior can be very hard on those around them. Let your teen know that it is okay for them to feel sad and angry but that they cannot lash out at others. Let them know that you support them and appreciate their efforts to stay calm when they are in pain. Be mindful not to use too much discipline for irritable behavior.
- Adjust expectations. Until your teen is feeling better, it may be necessary to look at their schedule and see what they can manage. Communicate with school staff about accommodations, if needed.
- Stay alert to comments about safety or suicide. Parents should discuss concerns about suicidal thoughts with health providers.

How you can help yourself

- Be kind to yourself. Recognize that you are doing heroic work as a parent.
- Address your own mental health, if needed. Depression runs in families. Treating depression in parents has been shown to improve mood and behavior in their children. If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, getting treatment for yourself and modeling healthy behavior will help your child.

Resources



Scan for the NAMI webpage
on depression



Scan for the AACAP Depression
Medication Guide for Parents

