



Clark County TeenTalk

Nonjudgmental support for teens, by teens

Monday to Thursday: 4-9 pm Friday: 4-7 pm

Call 360.397.CHAT [2428] or text 360.984.0936

ccteentalk1@hotmail.com

www.ccteentalk.clark.wa.gov



@PeppyPenerson



Depression in Teenagers

Clark County TeenTalk



Topics:

- Signs and symptoms
- Differences in teenage and adult depression
- Untreated depression can lead to...
- Suicide warning signs
- Tips for talking to a depressed teen
- Dealing with suicidal thoughts
- What can you do to feel better?
- Helping a depressed friend

Signs and symptoms of depression in teenagers

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Tearfulness or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in eating and sleeping habit
- Restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide



Encourage your friend to get help.

Urge your depressed friend to talk to a parent, teacher, or counselor. It might be scary for your friend to admit to an authority figure that there is a problem. Having you there might help, so offer to go along for support.

Stick with your friend through the hard times.

Depression can make people do and say things that are hurtful or strange. But your friend is going through a very difficult time, so try not to take it personally. Once your friend gets help, he or she will go back to being the person you know and love. In the meantime, make sure you have other friends or family taking care of you – your feelings are important and need to be respected, too.

Speak up if your friend is suicidal.

If your friend is joking or talking about suicide, giving possessions away, or saying goodbye, tell a trusted adult immediately. Your only responsibility at this point is to get your friend help, and get it fast. Even if you promised not to tell, your friend needs your help. It's better to have a friend who is temporarily angry at you than one who is no longer alive.



5. Avoid alcohol and drugs

You may be tempted to drink or use drugs in an effort to escape from your feelings and get a "mood boost", even if just for a short time. However, substance use can not only make depression worse, but can cause you to become depressed in the first place. Alcohol and drug use can also increase suicidal feelings. In short, drinking and taking drugs will make you feel worse—not better—in the long run.

If you're addicted to alcohol or drugs, seek help. You will need special treatment for your substance problem on top of whatever treatment you're receiving for your depression.



Helping a depressed friend

Get your friend to talk to you.

Starting a conversation about depression can be daunting, but you can say something simple: "You seem like you are really down, and not yourself. I really want to help you. Is there anything I can do?"

Know that your friend doesn't expect you to have the answers.

Your friend probably just needs someone to listen and be supportive. By listening and responding in a non-judgmental and reassuring manner, you are helping in a major way.

The differences between teenage and adult depression

Irritable or angry mood – Irritability, rather than sadness, is often the predominant mood in depressed teens. A depressed teenager may be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, or prone to angry outbursts.

Unexplained aches and pains – Depressed teens frequently complain about physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches. If a thorough physical exam does not reveal a medical cause, these aches and pains may indicate depression.

Extreme sensitivity to criticism – Depressed teens are extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure. This is a particular problem for "over-achievers."

Withdrawing from *some*, but not all people – While adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed, teenagers usually keep up at least some friendships. However, teens with depression may socialize less than before, pull away from their parents, or start hanging out with a different crowd. plagued by feelings of worthlessness, making them extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure. This is a particular problem for "over-achievers."



Untreated depression can lead to

- **Problems at school** – Depression can cause low energy and concentration difficulties. At school, this may lead to poor attendance, a drop in grades, or frustration with schoolwork in a formerly good student.
- **Running away** – Many depressed teens run away from home or talk about running away. Such attempts are usually a cry for help.
- **Substance abuse** – Teens may use alcohol or drugs in an attempt to “self-medicate” their depression. Unfortunately, substance abuse only makes things worse.
- **Low self-esteem** – Depression can trigger and intensify feelings of ugliness, shame, failure, and unworthiness.
- **Eating disorders** – Anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, and yo-yo dieting are often signs of unrecognized depression.
- **Internet addiction** – Teens may go online to escape from their problems. But excessive computer use only increases their isolation and makes them more depressed.
- **Self-injury** – Cutting, burning, and other kinds of self-mutilation are almost always associated with depression.
- **Reckless behavior** – Depressed teens may engage in dangerous or high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving, out-of-control drinking, and unsafe sex.
- **Violence** – Some depressed teens (usually boys who are the victims of bullying) become violent. As in the case of the Columbine school massacre, self-hatred and a wish to die can erupt into violence and homicidal rage.
- **Suicide** – Teens who are seriously depressed often think, speak, or make “attention-getting” attempts at suicide. Suicidal thoughts or behaviors should always be taken very seriously.

3. Remember that you are not alone

You might be surprised at how many other teens suffer from depression. You are not alone, and neither is your depression a hopeless case. Even though it can feel like depression will never lift, it eventually will—and with proper treatment and healthy choices, that day can come even sooner. In the meantime, you might need therapy or medication to help you while you sort out your feelings. Look into your treatment options with your parents. If medication is being considered, do your research before making a decision, as some antidepressants used for adults can actually make teens feel worse.

4. Keep your body healthy

Making healthy lifestyle choices can do wonders for your mood. Things like diet and exercise have been shown to help depression. Ever heard of a “runner’s high”? You actually get a rush of endorphins from exercising, which makes you feel instantly happier. Physical activity can be as effective as medications or therapy for depression, so get involved in sports, ride your bike, or take a dance class. Any activity helps! Even a short walk can be beneficial.

As for food, it’s true that you are what you eat. An improper diet can make you feel sluggish and tired, which worsens depression symptoms. Your body needs vitamins and minerals such as iron and the B-vitamins. Make sure you’re feeding your mind with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Talk to your parents, doctor or school nurse about how to ensure your diet is adequately nutritious.



1. Ask for help if you're stressed

Stress and worry can take a big toll, even leading to depression. Talk to a teacher or school counselor if exams or classes seem overwhelming. Likewise, if you have a health concern you feel you can't talk to your parents about—such as a pregnancy scare or drug problem—seek medical attention at a clinic or see a doctor. A health professional can help you approach your parents (if that is required) and guide you toward appropriate treatment.

If you're dealing with relationship, friendship, or family problems, talk to an adult you trust. Your school may have a counselor you can go to for help, or you may want to ask your parents to make an appointment for you to see a therapist.

2. Try not to isolate yourself

When you're depressed, you may not feel like seeing anybody or doing anything. Just getting out of bed in the morning can be difficult, but isolating yourself only makes depression worse. Make it a point to stay social, even if that's the last thing you want to do. As you get out into the world, you may find yourself feeling better.

Spend time with friends, especially those who are active, upbeat, and make you feel good about yourself. Avoid hanging out with those who abuse drugs or alcohol, get you into trouble, or who make you feel insecure. It's also a good idea to limit the time you spend playing video games or surfing online.



Suicide warning signs in teenagers

- Talking or joking about committing suicide.
- Saying things like, "I'd be better off dead," "I wish I could disappear forever," or "There's no way out."
- Speaking positively about death or romanticizing dying ("If I died, people might love me more").
- Writing stories and poems about death, dying, or suicide.
- Engaging in reckless behavior or having a lot of accidents resulting in injury.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Saying goodbye to friends and family as if for good.
- Seeking out weapons, pills, or other ways to kill themselves.



Tips for talking to a depressed teen

- **Offer support** – Let depressed teenagers know that you're there for them, fully and unconditionally. Hold back from asking a lot of questions (teenagers don't like to feel patronized or crowded), but make it clear that you're ready and willing to provide whatever support they need.
- **Be gentle but persistent** – Don't give up if your adolescent shuts you out at first. Talking about depression can be very tough for teens. Be respectful of your child's comfort level while still emphasizing your concern and willingness to listen.
- **Listen without lecturing** – Resist any urge to criticize or pass judgment once your teenager begins to talk. The important thing is that your child is communicating. Avoid offering unsolicited advice or ultimatums as well.
- **Validate feelings** – Don't try to talk teens out of their depression, even if their feelings or concerns appear silly or irrational to you. Simply acknowledge the pain and sadness they are feeling. If you don't, they will feel like you don't take their emotions seriously.



Dealing with suicidal thoughts

- **There is ALWAYS another solution, even if you can't see it right now.** Many kids who have attempted suicide (and survived) say that they did it because they mistakenly felt there was no other solution to a problem they were experiencing. At the time, they could not see another way out – but in truth, they didn't really want to die. Remember that no matter how horribly you feel, these emotions will pass.
- **Having thoughts of hurting yourself or others does not make you a bad person.** Depression can make you think and feel things that are out of character. No one should judge you or condemn you for these feelings if you are brave enough to talk about them.
- **If your feelings are uncontrollable, tell yourself to wait 24 hours before you take any action.** This can give you time to really think things through and give yourself some distance from the strong emotions that are plaguing you. During this 24-hour period, try to talk to someone – anyone - as long as they are not another suicidal or depressed person. Call a hotline or talk to a friend. What do you have to lose?
- **If you're afraid you can't control yourself, make sure you are never alone.** Even if you can't verbalize your feelings, just stay in public places, hang out with friends or

