
How to support a teen that needs help

According to the World Health Organization, globally one in seven 10- to 19-year-olds experiences a mental health disorder. This is partially caused by sudden hormonal shifts that accompany puberty and adolescence, as well as increased social pressures and burdens. For example, many teens cope with bullying—in person and through social media—sports-related pressure, relationships, body image issues and eating disorders and increased risk-taking sexually and with drugs or alcohol.

So how can you best support your teen?

Share your observations in a non-judgmental manner:

- You don't seem to be hanging out or talking to your friends as much as usual—what is different?
- I've noticed that your school work seems to be suffering. Are you having trouble with a specific subject or teacher, or is there something bigger going on? How can I help?
- You seem to have lost interest in hobbies/sports/friends/school that you used to love—are you feeling depressed?

Stay centered on your teen rather than your personal feelings about the situation. No matter what is occurring—be it depression or risk-taking behavior—the teen in front of you who needs help is still your child, and how you react can be the difference in how their recovery unfolds. When you approach your teen:

- Respond with love and practice patience—Resorting to kindness over anger, and leaving room for silence so your teen can process their thoughts can make all the difference in a tough conversation.
- Switch up the setting—Where you choose to have a conversation about mental health or substance use could make you or your teen more comfortable. You could take your teen to dinner or approach the topic while driving or walking the dog together. Sometimes talking during an activity that requires little eye contact can make the conversation more comfortable. Figure out what works best for everyone.
- Based on the information you learn, calmly determine what the best next steps are for your teen—Continuing to monitor the situation and periodically check in; making an appointment with a primary care provider; seeking support for drug or alcohol use; etc. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.
- Remember that you are not alone, and convey the same message to your teen—you're in this together.

