



Helping Teens Deal With Depression

Unfortunately, many teens experience depression and feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Teens suffering from depression become so discouraged trying to cope with mounting pressures that they experience a persistent mood change resulting in overwhelming feelings of sadness, despair, or anger. They see no hope for happiness or success, and as a result, their chances of achieving happiness and success are greatly diminished. Left untreated, depression can escalate into problems at school, home, and even in the community, including drug use as a means of self-medicating, suicide, and other forms of violence to oneself and to others.

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For parents of children from birth to age 5
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- **Active Parenting of Teens:**
For parents of preteens and teens
- **Crossroads of Parenting & Divorce:**
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Continue your experience as an “active” parent by reviewing what you learn in the class in your accompanying parent guide. Each guide contains additional information, activities, and worksheets to help you practice what you learn.

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The Signs and Symptoms

Depression is a highly treatable condition, but many parents miss the warning signs or misread depression as just another phase of adolescence. Depression is more than a prolonged bout of moodiness or sadness. Parents should be on the lookout for the following symptoms:

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Frequent crying
- Apathy (not caring)
- Withdrawal from most friends or family
- Loss of interest in friends or activities
- Negative changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Restlessness and agitation
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Extreme sensitivity to criticism
- Mentions of suicide or death

If a number of these signs are present, it is important to open a dialogue with the teen. Here are some effective communication skills:

- Avoid communication blocks like judging, psychologizing, interrogating, placating, giving advice, commanding, distracting, being sarcastic, moralizing, being a know-it-all, focusing on mistakes, negative expectations, or perfectionism
- Use the **5 STEPS of ACTIVE COMMUNICATION**:
 1. **LISTEN ACTIVELY.** By giving full attention, keeping your own talking to a minimum, acknowledge and reflect what you're hearing and listen with empathy
 2. **LISTEN FOR FEELINGS.** Teens need to acknowledge and accept their feelings rather than keep them bottled up. Teach teens to describe how they feel but until they learn this “emotional intelligence”, listeners will have to watch body language and listen to tone of voice for more clues.
 3. **LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVES AND EVALUATE CONSEQUENCES.** Teens are likely to not consider the pros and cons of various options. A parent's role is to help them to look at alternative options and the consequences of each.
 4. **OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT.** Once a teen has a potential solution to their problem, a word of encouragement from the parent can help give them the courage to put it into action.
 5. **FOLLOW UP LATER.** A follow-up helps the teen learn from the experience and validates that the parent's interest was genuine. If the results were good, then a little praise for the way the teen handled the situation reinforces their positive experience.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the **ACFC website**, click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.