



How do I know if a youth is feeling depressed?

Teen years can be tough and challenging. Not only are they dealing with hormonal changes, but facing the transition from childhood to adolescence. Everyone feels sad from time to time, but usually those feelings pass. Depression is different in that moods of sadness persist longer than normal. Not knowing the difference can inhibit a youth from getting help. Some may not know where to go, may worry what others would say, or think it is part of becoming a teenager. Depression is a treatable mental illness with a number of effective treatments.

Causes

There is no one cause that leads to depression, but there are several factors to consider. For some it can be a chemical imbalance in the brain, it can be environmental such as surroundings or life experiences. Any stressful situation may trigger depression. They may be feeling a lot of pressure and stress, and they are still developing the skills they need to deal with that pressure.

Remember, EVERYTHING is transitioning for them!

- They may be facing added responsibilities at home or at school.
- Adjusting to a more challenging academic schedule and/or added assignments.
- Friends may be changing as well as they are discovering themselves.

The symptoms of depression in youth can vary.

- Many children display sadness or low mood similar to adults who are depressed.
- The primary symptoms of depression revolve around sadness, a feeling of hopelessness, and mood changes.
- Irritability or anger including vocal outbursts or crying.
- Continuous feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness or guilt.
- Thoughts of death and or suicide.
- Participating in self-injurious behaviors, i.e. the intentional self-infliction of wounds including, but not limited to cutting, burning, or otherwise wounding their skin.
- Withdrawal from social activities or reduced ability to function during events.
- Increased sensitivity to rejection.
- Difficulty concentrating, whether at home, school or during activities.
- Problems concentrating, remembering information or making decisions.
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy.
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, including an increase in alcohol or drug use.

Physical Changes

- Changes in sleep: sleeplessness or excessive sleep.
- Changes in appetite: either increased or decreased. This can also include developing an eating disorder.
- Fatigue and low energy.
- Aches, pains, headaches, cramps or digestive issues that do not go away

How YOU can help?

- Show you care! Listen carefully and be genuine. Your youth has shared something very important with you. Be sure to stay approachable.
- Never discount the feelings youth express. Offer hope by listening and validating feelings.
- Ask Questions, while being direct, calm and non-confrontational. Remain empathetic with your tone.
- Ask for help! There are many individuals within your community who can get your youth the support they need.

Who you can talk to if you are concerned

- Talk with school staff, including the school counselor, Principal, or Vice Principal about concerning behaviors.
- Seek help from Therapist, Counselor, or Life Coach.
- Consult with a Health Care Provider or child's Primary Care Physician.
- If someone is in crisis do not leave them alone, call the **San Diego Access and Crisis Line 1(888) 724-7240**.
 - Available 7 days a week/24 hours a day.
- For a medical emergency call 911
 - If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis you can call 911 or your local Sheriff's Office and ask for a PERT (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team). PERT provides clinical support to law enforcement and the community for calls involving persons have a mental health crisis.

REMEMBER: Tell the support persons about the signs you've seen in your teen that are concerning and be specific:

"My teen's stress has gone beyond what is normal and I am worried about them because....."