

## **Counseling Corner**

### **Understanding Teenage Depression**

from the American Counseling Association

Virtually every teenager will have his or her moody moments. Parents may find their teenage child withdrawn, difficult to talk to, or even openly hostile. It can be frustrating for parents and sometimes indicates a real problem.

It isn't difficult to understand why the typical teenager years can be difficult. For both teenagers and parents those years from 13 to 19 can sometimes seem out of control. There are the ongoing pressures of school work, the normal conflicts of adolescent social life, the physical changes brought on by puberty, and the ever present anxieties of our times, from school violence to terrorism threats.

While most teens are able to handle such pressures with only occasional bouts of anxiety and moodiness, there are times when teens may find themselves overwhelmed by what is happening to them. That may result in a few days of your teen being more moody, irritable and withdrawn, or it may turn into a serious issue known as clinical depression.

Clinical depression can be difficult to recognize in a teen. While adult depression is usually seen as sadness, teens tend to "mask" what they're feeling. Instead of seeming sad, they may seem constantly bored, irritable and uncommunicative. They may engage in risky behavior and withdraw from activities that they once enjoyed.

While it takes a professional counselor or other mental health professional to diagnose clinical depression, there are signs that parents can look for: a prolonged sad, empty or anxious mood; trouble concentrating; eating and sleeping problems; decreased energy; or excessive feelings of guilt and worthlessness. When several of these symptoms are present for more than a few days, it's time for a parent to pay attention and take action.

A starting point is simply encouraging your teen to share feelings and thoughts. Your job is to listen without being judgmental while acknowledging the reality of what your teen is feeling. Most importantly, take any references, threats or attempts at self-hurt seriously. Teen suicides are this nation's third leading cause of death for young people.

If what you're hearing sounds serious, and if you've been seeing signs of depression for some time, seek out professional help. It might be your teen's school counselor or an outside professional counselor specializing in adolescent and family

issues. The right help can do much get your teenager back on track and fully enjoying his or her adolescence.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcorner@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcorner@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [counseling.org](http://counseling.org)

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