

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Recognizing Teen Depression As A Serious Problem

from the American Counseling Association

Virtually every teenager is going to be unhappy at times. It's a period in life when there are all kinds of pressures and changes every teen faces. Add in hormone havoc and it's easy to understand all those of mood swings your teen displays.

But depression is different than just passing periods of stress and sadness. Depression is a very real mental health issue that can produce serious effects and is usually a factor in teen suicides. It's a more common problem than many parents realize, with studies indicating about one out of eight adolescents is suffering from teen depression.

So how do you tell the difference between normal teen unhappiness and a real problem of depression? A starting point is to ask how long you are seeing an unhappy teen. While many things can make the average teen unhappy (relationship issues, school performance, social status with peers), these are usually transitory and forgotten about in days.

But when your teenager's unhappiness lasts for two weeks or more, in combination with other symptoms of depression, there may be a serious problem which needs the help of a health professional.

Symptoms of depression aren't always easy to spot. Most teens tend to be stressed, private and not eager to communicate their feelings, and especially their problems, to their parents.

But when a teen is facing a serious form of depression it will begin to interfere with the teen's ability to function normally. You may notice previously good grades suddenly slipping, or see a dramatic change in the child's attitude. There may be a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, a major change in friends, or a withdrawing from relationships and becoming uncommunicative.

Don't ignore warning signs. Be more involved with your teen. Ask questions -- about school, friends, and current activities. Your child may resent the intrusion, but you need to show you care, are concerned and want to help.

If you suspect problems, talk to adults who know your teen, including teachers, school counselors and sports coaches. If they have also noticed potential problems, seek help. Your school counselor, family physician or local mental health organization can usually offer suggestions for professional counselors specializing in teen issues.

Teen depression is not just a "phase" that will be outgrown. Ignoring it can leave your teen's life hanging in the balance.

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

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