



"Suicide is not a choice. Typically it results from the serious illness of depression, when one's pain exceeds their resources for coping with it."
- JIM & ANN GANLEY

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HELP IS AVAILABLE

What do I do if I am concerned for my child?

Youth are unlikely to seek help themselves. Do not ignore warning signs. Talk to your child and ask them if they are having thoughts of suicide. You may use both direct and indirect questions. Variations of the following examples may be appropriate:

- Have you ever felt like life is not worth living?
- What things in your life make you want to go on living?
- How does the future look to you?
- What things in your life would lead you to want to escape from life?
- Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and not wake up?
- When things are tough, people might feel death would be better: have you ever felt that way?
- What things would lead you to feel more hopeful about the future (e.g., resolution of stressors, treatment, reconciliation of a relationship)?

Both asking questions and making observations can help alert you to additional support your child may need. While your child may or may not be dismissive of you, if you feel something is wrong trust your judgment. Take all signs seriously and the following actions may be most helpful:

- Remain calm
- Focus on your concern for their well-being
- Listen, listen, and listen
- Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever
- Do not judge or dismiss their feelings
- Provide constant supervision; do not leave the youth alone
- Remove means for self-harm
- Most importantly, GET HELP!

Help is available. Treatment for depression is as effective for youth as it is for adults. It may include counseling, family therapy, group therapy, behavioral programs, medications, or inpatient treatment. Speak to a qualified medical professional to gain proper diagnosis and treatment. Reach out to resources in your community including the family doctor, school counselor, psychologist, clergy, mental health agency, or local hospital. Keep trying resources until you find the best fit for your child.

SUPPORTING FAMILY

How can I support the mental health of my family?

You can promote the mental health of your family by incorporating certain practices into your daily activities and listening to each other. Ask family members for their input in creating routines that support the overall well-being of your family. Some ways you can promote protective factors include:

- Discuss and get involved in each other's activities
- Do not lecture or minimize each other's feelings
- Get to know teachers, coaches, and friends of your children
- Handle any conflicts with constructive communication
- Engage in laughter, pleasurable activities, physical activities, and family meals
- Each family member should obtain adequate sleep, at least 7 to 9 hours per day
- Remind your children that you are always there for them
- Keep a daily, open dialogue to make it easier to talk when tough topics arise
- Remember how challenging childhood stages were for you, but do not compare
- Establish rules for safety and appropriate consequences

Resources

National Hotlines (available 24/7)

- Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Psychiatric Emergency Response Network
1-866-FOR-PERN (367-7376)
- Kristen Brooks Hope Center
1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Online

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
afsp.org
- Ganley Foundation
ganleyfoundation.org

INTRODUCTION

It is normal to feel sad at times, but with depression, these feelings are experienced for an extended period, interfere with daily functioning and relationships, and may get worse. Depression is a medical illness, just like cancer and diabetes, and can affect people across age, gender, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries. It affects your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and overall health. For most people, the onset of this mental disorder occurs during adolescence. It can be difficult for a parent to distinguish if their child's behaviors are "typical teen behaviors" or something more serious. Youth depression may also not be recognized as it often presents as agitation and irritability instead of sadness. Youth depression is associated with poor social functioning, decreased school performance, contact with the criminal justice system, and an increased risk for drug, alcohol, and nicotine use, as well as suicide. There are many effective treatments for depression, but first it has to be recognized.

In the United States...

Youth Depression:

- The prevalence of depression in youth is increasing and the age of onset is declining
- Twenty years ago, it was believed that children could not experience depression
- Roughly 20% of youth experience a depressive episode by the age of 18
- Less than 1 in 5 youths in need of mental health services receives treatment
- Depression is the leading cause of suicide

Youth Suicide:

- Approximately 12 youth under the age of 25 die by suicide each day
- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for college students and the third-leading cause for high school students
- In the United States, 8% of high school students attempt suicide each year
- 10-13% of junior and senior high school students report having moderate to serious levels of suicidal thoughts
- Over 90% of those who die by suicide had a mental illness at the time of their death, oftentimes undiagnosed or untreated

SYMPTOMS

How can I tell if my child is experiencing depression?

Teenagers experience mood swings, sleep late, act rebellious, speak their own language, and gravitate mostly towards their peers. Since behaviors change at each developmental phase, it can be challenging to distinguish developmentally appropriate behaviors from more serious symptoms. The following signs may help identify depression in your child:

- Withdrawal from their typical peer group
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Increased irritability, agitation, or aggression
- Inattention towards appearance
- Significant changes in appetite or weight (eating either more or less)
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping excessively or unable to sleep)
- Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Changes in school performance, conduct, or attendance
- Inappropriate feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or failure
- Self-injury and/or involvement in high risk activities
- Loss of concentration, indecision, or failed responsibilities
- Low energy and sluggishness; or conversely, difficulty staying still
- Expressions of sadness
- Low self-esteem



What should I ask myself if I am unsure if it is depression?

Every child's character and personality is unique, so trust your instincts as a parent. If you have concerns about your child's well-being, always consult a qualified medical professional. You may ask yourself the following questions for clarification:

- Are these changes affecting daily functioning?
- Have symptoms persisted for a while?
- Are the behaviors I am observing out of character for my child?
- Does my child seem easily upset or bothered by almost everyone?
- Is the family environment disrupted by my child's mood or behaviors?
- Do I see lost motivation or excessive pessimism?
- Have responsibilities been neglected in more than one environment?
- Are the changes I am witnessing severe, very frequent, or significant?

How can I tell if my child is at risk for suicide?

Untreated depression can cause hopelessness and in some cases lead to suicide. There are certain factors which may indicate if your child has an increased risk for suicide. These may include:

- A family history of mental illness
- Distressing life events such as loss, failure, bullying, rejection, or transitions
- Untreated mental health issues including mood disorders like depression or bipolar, anxiety disorders, and conduct disorders
- Previous or ongoing substance abuse issues
- Previous suicide attempts or threats of suicide
- Diminished ability to handle stress or problems
- Subject to bullying or harassment
- Questioning sexuality or issues related to sexual orientation
- Availability of firearms or other lethal means
- Impulsive youth are more apt to act on suicidal urges
- Exposure to a suicide

WARNING SIGNS

What are the warning signs I can look out for?

When depression is severe, the following signs may be exhibited by a youth and indicate the need for immediate intervention. Some signs are subtle, while others may be expressed in a more obvious manner. In most cases, warning signs are exhibited during the year before a suicide. These may include:

- Inappropriate references of death
- Overwhelming tiredness
- Uncharacteristic mood changes
- Indifference towards general daily life
- Excessive substance abuse or recklessness
- Impulsiveness, extreme anger, or acting out
- Withdrawal from peers, family, and activities
- Making final arrangements, such as giving away favorite possessions
- Expressing that others would be better off without them
- Switching from sadness to sudden calmness



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