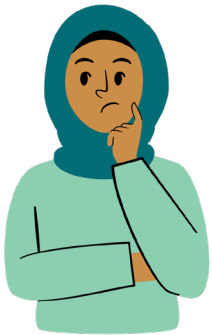




Supporting Your Teen's Mental Health

Tips for Parents & Caregivers

July 2024



How can I let my teenager know I care about their mental health, and I take it seriously?

How do I know if my child is struggling with their mental health?



How do I start a conversation with my teenager about their mental health?

How do I encourage my child to share their feelings with me?



As a parent or caregiver, you play a critical role in supporting your teen's mental health. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report 2013-2023 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- 29% of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the past 30 days and 40% reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless over the past year.
- Over the past decade, rates of suicide among young people have increased. One in five high school students reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- Female youth reported greater levels of poor mental health than male youth.

The good news is that there are many ways parents and caregivers can help!

The [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health](#) has many recommendations for parents on how to address mental health challenges and help youth become resilient and thrive:

- **Be a role model by taking care of your own mental and physical health.** You can show your child/youth you look for help when you need it and demonstrate positive ways of dealing with stress.
- **Help children and youth develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with you and other supportive adults.** Children build resilience through stable relationships with supportive adults. Encourage open communication, show interest in the activities they enjoy, accept them for who they are, praise them for things they do well, and encourage them to ask for help when they need it.
- **Encourage children and youth to build healthy social relationships with peers.** You can give them healthy opportunities to interact with peers (sports, after-school programs, volunteering) and help them learn how to manage peer pressure. Have clear conversations with your teen about their values and teach them how to be comfortable and confident expressing their needs and boundaries.
- **Do your best to provide children and youth with a supportive, stable, and predictable home and neighborhood environment.** You can try to help children stick to a regular and predictable daily schedule, such as regular dinnertime and bedtime, be thoughtful about whether and how to discuss stressful topics with them, and minimize their exposure to violence.
- **Try to minimize negative influences and behaviors in young people's lives.** Talk with them about the risks of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.



- **Ensure children and youth have regular check-ups with a pediatrician, family doctor, or other health care professional.** Health care professionals can help you monitor your child's health, give you advice on how to prevent problems, and diagnose and treat physical and mental illnesses.
- **Look out for warning signs of distress and seek help when needed.** Talk with your child's doctor, a nurse, a school counselor, or other professional.

WARNING SIGNS

- Irritability
- Anger
- Withdrawal or loss of interest in favorite activities
- Difficulty sleeping
- Mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Excessive worry
- Changes in appetite
- Changes in their appearance, performance at school, or other behaviors



- **Minimize your child's access to means of self-harm, including firearms and prescription medications.** Keep medications out of reach for youth. If you choose to keep firearms in the home, ensure they are stored safely: unloaded and locked up in a lock box or safe.
- **Pay attention to how youth spend time online.** Digital technology has many positive applications for youth, but it can also contribute to harmful experiences like bullying or negatively comparing themselves to others.
- **Be a voice for mental health in your community.** You can promote awareness of mental health among your friends and family and within the organizations you are a part of such as schools, community organizations, and churches.

Most importantly, talk with your teen about mental health and how important it is to get help when they need it. Tell them that mental health is just as important as physical health, everyone struggles with difficult emotions at some point in their lives, and it's important not to be alone with their feelings. Here are some tips on having those conversations.

Starting the conversation:



- Plan what you want to say.
 - Make note of any symptoms or behaviors that worry you.
 - Find information online from a trusted source or consult with your teen's doctor or a mental health professional if you need information for your conversation.
 - Practice your conversation.
- Choose a comfortable time and place to talk.
 - Make sure you're not rushed or distracted by other things.
 - Pick a time when you feel calm.
 - Talk with your teen while you're doing something together, like going for a walk or having a meal.

During your talk:



- Expect that your teen might be hesitant to talk with you. Reassure your teen that it's safe for them to be open with you.
- Speak at a developmentally appropriate level in a clear, straightforward manner.
- Listen attentively! Let them speak and give them your full attention.
- Take them seriously. Don't overreact or dismiss what they're saying. It's important to validate your teen's emotions.
- Let them know that mental health is something many people struggle with.

- If you don't know the answer to something, tell them you'll help them find out.
- Some ideas for what to say:
 - *"I've noticed you don't seem like your usual self. Would you like to talk about it?"*
 - *"Can you tell me more about what is going on?"*
 - *"I'm here to listen. How can I help?"*
 - *"If you would feel more comfortable speaking with a mental health professional, I'd love to help you find someone."*
 - *"I'm concerned about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or others?"*

After your talk:

- Check in regularly with your teen.
- Talk to your teen's doctor, school nurse, or other health care provider about any challenge your teen is experiencing and ask for advice.
- If your teen needs additional help, consider seeking a mental health specialist.
- Talk to your teen's provider about medication and treatment plans.
- Learn more! On the next page are some resources you may find helpful.

Finding a mental health specialist:

- If you have health insurance, see their list of providers.
- Ask for a recommendation or referral from your teen's primary care provider.
- Talk with other family members or friends about professionals they like.
- Ask your teen's school counselor for a recommendation.
- Search the internet for nonprofit, government, or mental health organizations in your area. Use search terms like "counselors," "psychologists," "psychiatrists," or "social service organizations."
- Use an [online directory](#) to find a mental health provider near you who has skills in the issues your teen is facing. You can also use filters to help you narrow your search. For example, you can find a provider of a particular sex, age, ethnicity, or religion. You can also search for one who speaks a particular language.
- Learn about the different types of mental health providers and what each one does. Some are able to prescribe medication, and some are not.
 - Doctors (with Doctor of Medicine [MD] or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine [DO] degrees), physician assistants, and some psychiatric-mental health nurses can prescribe medication.
 - Most psychologists, licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs), licensed professional counselors (LPCs), or licensed clinical professional counselors (LCPCs) cannot prescribe medication.

Keep in mind:

- **Specialty:** Look for a provider who specializes in your teen's main area of need. If your teen is struggling with anxiety, try to find a mental health professional who specializes in anxiety disorders.
- **Severity:** Your teen's primary care provider will be able to tell you more about any symptoms your child is experiencing. They may recommend that your teen see a psychiatrist, psychologist, or both.
- **Health insurance coverage:** Your insurance provider or Medicaid may have a list of mental health providers they cover. They may only cover certain types of mental health providers and may have limits on the number of visits.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES AND HOTLINES

Information for you:







- CDC: [What Is Children's Mental Health](#)
- Healthychildren.org: [Emotional Wellness](#) ↗
- UNICEF: [Mental health and well-being](#) ↗
- Child Mind Institute: [Family Resource Center](#) ↗
- Netsmartz: [Resources for Parents, Educators & Communities](#) ↗
- Common Sense Media: [Parents' Ultimate Guides](#) ↗
- SAMHSA: [What is Mental Health?](#)



Information for your teen:

- [We Think Twice™ Mental Health page](#)
We Think Twice™ has quizzes, articles, and infographics geared especially for teens.
- [YouthEngaged4Change](#)
This site offers articles, inspiring stories, videos, and blogs about adolescent mental health and well-being.
- NIH: [Meditation and Mindfulness: What You Need To Know](#)
This article is about meditation and mindfulness (how it works and why it's good for you).
- NIH: [Your Healthiest Self: Wellness Toolkits](#)
This site provides strategies and checklists with steps you can take to improve emotional health and well-being.
- GirlsHealth.Gov: [Your Feelings](#)
The "Your Feelings" section of this website offers guidance for teenage girls on recognizing a mental health problem, getting help, and talking to parents.
- SAMHSA: [For Young People Looking for Help](#)
Information about signs of mental health issues and how to get help.
- CDC: [How Right Now: Finding What Helps](#)
This CDC page covers lots of emotions like stress, grief, and loss, and discusses ways to cope and ways to get support.
- National Academies of Medicine: [Tools for Youth and Teens](#) ↗
National Academies of Medicine has stories showing how teens use different coping techniques to feel better.

Hotlines:

- General Emergency Services
Call or text 911.
- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) 
Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org for free and confidential support for people in distress. For TTY Users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988.
- [LOVEIS: National Dating Abuse Helpline](#) 
Call 866-331-9474, text “LOVEIS” to 22522, or use TTY: 800-787-3224 to access 24/7 support if you or someone you know may be experiencing or is at risk of experiencing dating abuse. Remember that dating abuse is a pattern of behaviors used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner—physical violence is just one example of dating abuse.
- [LOVEIS: National Dating Abuse Helpline – Deaf Services](#) 
Deaf advocates are available 24/7 to answer your call about dating abuse. Call 855-812-1001 by video phone.
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#) 
Call 888-373-7888 or text “HELP” to 233733 for 24/7 confidential support if you or someone you know may be a victim of human trafficking. TTY: 711.
- [National Runaway Safeline](#) 
Call 800-786-2929 (800-RUNAWAY) or text 66008 for 24/7 confidential and non-judgmental support for youth considering running away from their living situation.
- [SAMHSA's National Treatment Referral Routing Service](#)
Call 800-662-4357 (800-662-HELP), text your zip code to 435748 (HELP4U), or use TTY: 800-487-4889 for free, confidential, 24/7 treatment referrals and information services (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental or substance use disorders.
- [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#) 
Call 844-762-8483 (844-7NATIVE) to access a free, confidential and anonymous 24/7 domestic, dating, and sexual violence helpline for Native Americans.

This tip sheet was created by the *We Think Twice*™ campaign with support from the Family and Youth Services Bureau. It is one of several valuable resources designed for youth-serving professionals as well as parents/caregivers. It is intended to encourage positive youth development by strengthening prevention education and other youth development programs.



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