



How to talk to your teenager about their mental health



Step-by-step guide:

Talking to teens about mental health

Don't dismiss

1

Take their concerns seriously

- ◆ It might be easy to dismiss a teenager's concerns as 'just hormones' or 'just another part of growing up,' but that isn't helpful. Even if you can't relate to the problem, you can still express concerns about your teen's worry or distress.

Listen

2

Don't judge what you hear

- ◆ If you're in the middle of something else, find a time later in the day when you can talk and give your full attention. Don't judge what you hear. Just listen and be there.

Support

3

Encourage self-advocacy

- ◆ Ask your teen what they need. They might already have a good idea of the next steps they'd like to take. Don't worry about having all the answers right away. This can be an opportunity to learn together.

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Alternatives

4

Expanding support networks

- ◆ It can be difficult for some teens to talk with their parents about some subjects. Give additional places to seek support, such as a school counsellor, another family member, a local mental health or youth organization, a website, or a phone line.

Safe sharing

5

Thoughtful conversations

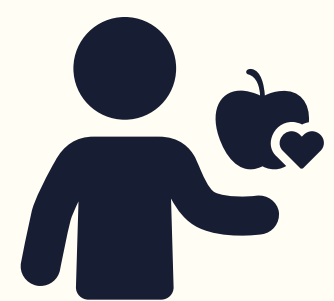
- ◆ Talk about safe situations to share personal details. It's very hard to take information back once it's posted on social media or shared with others, so encourage your teen to think about safe places to talk and seek support.

External support

6

Seeking professional help

- ◆ Your family doctor is a great place to start. They may be able to assess problems and provide treatment. They will also refer your teen to specialized mental health services, if needed. Your teen's school counsellors can also help. They can offer supports at school, and they can refer your teen to resources in the community.



**You don't need to
have all the answers.**

We all have mental health

Mental health is an important part of everyone's health. When you have good mental health, you can cope better with stress. When you have poor mental health, you might have a harder time feeling good about yourself. Mental health changes just like physical health can, so don't ignore problems. Even if you are diagnosed with a mental illness, mental illnesses are treatable.

What do I say?

Speak up if you're having problems.

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**You just need to be
open, curious, and
compassionate.**

Bad days are part of being human.

Everyone will have a bad day, or even a bad week, at times. It's normal to feel low, stressed, or anxious when we experience conflict, disappointment, loss, or other upsetting situations. The key is that the feelings should match the situation and you should start to feel better as things improve. For example, if you feel anxious about a school project, the feelings should go away when the project is finished.

Warning signs

These are some warning signs for common mental health problems. These signs may not point to a mental illness, but they show that it's time to talk with your teen and then with a doctor or mental health professional to see what's going on.

Anxiety that seems out of control or extreme given the situation

Excessive irritability or anger

Low mood that lasts for a long time or frequent tearfulness

Sensations (such as hearing voices) that aren't real

Unusually high mood, racing thoughts or ideas

Difficulties remembering information or making decisions

Hopelessness, worthlessness, or talk of death or wanting to escape

Strange beliefs that can't possibly be true

Excessive irritability or anger

Self-injury (such as cutting)

If anyone talks about suicide or ending their life, take it seriously. Call your local crisis line, the national Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868, or the First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line at 1-855-242-3310. If you think that someone's life is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Frequently asked questions

1

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

Choose a comfortable setting and express your concern based on observed behaviors. Emphasize listening over judgment, and be patient with their readiness to talk. It's key to make them feel safe and supported.

2

How can I encourage my teen to share their feelings?

Create a trustworthy atmosphere by engaging in open conversations and showing interest in their lives. Validate their feelings and emphasize your unconditional support, demonstrating it's okay to express vulnerability.

3

What should I do if my teen doesn't want to talk about their mental health?

Respect their privacy while reminding them of your readiness to listen. Suggest alternative confidants, such as trusted adults or professionals, and introduce the idea of anonymous support services, highlighting the strength in seeking help.

4

Where can I find professional mental health support for my teen?

Begin with your family doctor for an initial assessment and referrals to mental health professionals. School counselors can also offer in-school support and guide you towards community resources. Look into local mental health organizations and online services tailored for teens for additional assistance.



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