
Depression Signs Go Beyond Typical Teen Behavior

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Summary:

Adolescents may experience ups and downs as they make the transition into adulthood. If a teen exhibits behaviors beyond typical moodiness, however, s/he may be suffering from adolescent depression.

The adolescent years can be a trying and confusing time. They represent a time of change when a young person begins the transition from childhood to adulthood. These years also represent a period of self-discovery and relationship-building, from which important and difficult lessons may be learned. During the adolescent years, the sense of self is still being developed, and a teen's self-esteem may be fragile and easily influenced by various factors such as attitudes at home, the school environment, and peer relationships.

Adolescents may also have not had the chance to fully develop coping skills. Therefore, they may struggle to cope with life's challenges. They may be deeply affected by negative or stressful events such as the loss of a friend or loved one, a relationship break-up, rejection, pressure from parents, and/or failures in sports or academics. In many adolescents, inconsistent behavior and "ups and downs" come with the territory. But there are warning signs that could indicate a deeper issue.

Teen Depression

Prolonged periods of sadness, irritability or lack of interest, usually lasting for about two weeks or longer, may be signs depression or a mood disorder exists in an adolescent. Other signs or symptoms of adolescent depression may include:

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Uncharacteristically getting into trouble
- Decreased energy
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Anger and hostility
- Hopelessness
- Substance abuse

Displaying just one of these symptoms does not necessarily mean a teen is suffering from depression or a mood disorder. However, if a combination of these symptoms exists for a few weeks or more, a consultation with a mental health professional is recommended. If an adolescent discusses thoughts of suicide, seek help immediately.

Differences in Signs and Symptoms

Teen females are twice as likely to experience depression as their male counterparts. Some risk factors may include dissatisfaction with self-image, conflict within relationships, or negotiation of sexual issues.

Treatment

A combination of antidepressant medication and psychotherapy is a common approach when treating clinically diagnosed adolescent depression. An initial assessment may consist of a comprehensive evaluation involving the teen and parent during which time the nature, quality and duration of mood signs and symptoms are elucidated. A family history will also be reviewed, as a family history of depression may increase an adolescent's risk for depression. After the initial assessment is completed, the evaluator often begins discussion of treatment options in collaboration with the family. Such options may include the possible use of medication as well as psychotherapeutic interventions.

It is often difficult to determine whether an adolescent is "just been a teen" or struggling with deeper issues. It is important to be mindful of changes in adolescent functioning or behavior and to take action if signs of trouble are detected.

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