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NORTHWEST HEALTH SERVICES

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY



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Introduction

Adolescence is a unique time that can present many challenges. Young people are going through considerable physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive changes in an increasingly complex world. From social media influence to anxiety about the future to peer pressure, these transformative years can include a number of problems that affect mental health.

QUICKSTART
This guide examines the top mental health problems teens struggle with today and provides in-depth strategies for identifying warning signs, having hard conversations, and finding help.

Why Youth Mental Health Matters

Mental health challenges are the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people. Unfortunately, in recent years, there have been significant increases in certain mental health disorders in youth, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Mental health problems in youth often go hand-in-hand with other health risks, including drug use, violence, and risky sexual behavior.

As you move forward, remember:

- **Mental health is a key part of overall health.** Parents and teens don't need to feel ashamed or afraid of seeking treatment. It's no different from getting care for a broken bone or any other major health concern.
- **Try not to blame yourself** for your child's struggles. Life is hard, and kids are doing the best they can to manage pressures they face (just as you are). Have compassion for yourself and your child.
- Even if you have a history of mental health issues yourself, **you are not the root cause of your child's difficulties.** Showing love, trust, and respect for yourself and your teen is the healthiest way to ensure you both find the support you need.

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Parent/Caregiver's Role

Parenthood doesn't come with a manual and there will be a lot of trial and error to figure out what works best with your teen when addressing their mental health.

- **Be the best role model you can be** by taking care of your own mental and physical health, and seeking help for yourself when you need it.
- **Help your teen develop safe, stable relationships** with you and other supportive adults in their lives. Look for warning signs of distress and ask for help when needed.
- **Minimize access to means of self-harm,** including firearms and prescription medications.
- **Pick your battles.** Ask yourself if this specific behavior is doing any real harm. If you get in an argument with your teen, resist the urge to yell. Be matter-of-fact and stand your ground.
- **Environment matters.** Try to create a low-stress, supportive home. If you and your partner argue, keep it away from your kids. Give reasonable timelines for getting chores and tasks done, and give praise freely when your teen does well.
- **Encourage communication.** Let your teen know they can talk to you about their thoughts, feelings, and challenges. You may not agree on everything, but accept that their struggles are very real to them.
- **Timing is everything.** In stressful situations, allow your teen space and address issues later when they have regained control. Soften your voice and use short directions: "Come with me," "Take a deep breath," "Tell me what's going on."
- **Create routines.** Routines offer stability to young people, especially for those who struggle with anxiety. Keep both bedtime and the morning in mind. Make sure that mornings include a well-balanced breakfast to promote energy and boost mental clarity.

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Mental Health and Suicide

Common Issues Facing Teens

Young people experiencing mental health challenges deserve support, compassion, and care – not stigma and shame. Here are some of the more common mental health issues teens face regularly:

Anxiety

For most young people, anxiety doesn't last and goes away on its own. But for some, it doesn't go away that easily or is so intense that it interferes with everyday things, like learning, being social, and just enjoying life.

QUICKNOTE

Remember, anxiety in teenagers isn't always a bad thing. Feeling anxious can help keep them safe by getting them to think hard about the situation they're in. It can also motivate them to do their best or prepare them for higher pressure situations (e.g., public speaking, sporting events).

What can parents do?

- Take your teen's fears and emotions seriously. Don't meet them with too many questions; let them talk or sit in silence.
- Show your teen love and empathy.
- Make time to talk to your teen every day without distractions.
- Encourage healthy eating, physical activities, and good sleep habits.
- If you need help, reach out to your pediatrician or psychologist/counselor. School counselors can also be a helpful resource.

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Depression

Teen depression is a serious problem that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in activities. Issues such as peer pressure, academic expectations, and changing bodies can bring a lot of ups and downs. But for some teens, the lows are more than just temporary feelings.

What can parents do?

Encourage your teen to:

- Take steps to control stress, increase resilience, and boost self-esteem to help handle issues when they arise.
- Practice self-care by creating a healthy sleep schedule and using electronics in moderation.
- Reach out for social support, especially in times of crisis.
- Get help at the earliest sign of a problem to help prevent depression from getting worse.
- Maintain treatment, if recommended, even after symptoms subside, to help prevent relapse.

QUICKSTAT

In 2023, 40% of U.S. high-school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.

What if my teen is having thoughts of suicide?

Never ignore suicidal thoughts or actions. If your teen is in crisis, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or text "TALK" to **741741**. Trained staff will help you take the next steps to protect your child.

If your teen is thinking about suicide, but not in crisis, it's still critical to get help. Call your child's doctor or mental health provider right away to find resources for appropriate treatment.

988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

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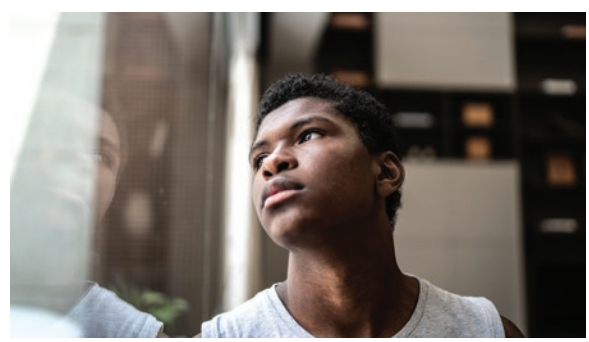
Stress

Teenagers face a variety of stresses. For some, it is trying to balance a part-time job with mountains of homework. Others may have to help out at home or deal with bullying or peer pressure. Whatever the cause, you can help by learning to recognize the signs of stress and teaching your teen healthy ways to manage it.

What can parents do?

Take notice if your teen:

- Acts angry or irritable.
- Cries often or seems teary.
- Withdraws from activities and people.
- Has trouble sleeping or sleeps too much.
- Seems overly worried.
- Eats too much or not enough.
- Complains of headaches or stomachaches.
- Seems tired or has no energy.
- Uses illicit drugs or alcohol to forget about their problems or "zone out."



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Suicide

Nothing can make a young person take their own life, but they might be more likely to think about or attempt suicide if they experience certain risk factors.

Risk Factors

Risk factors include:

- Mental health problems (e.g., depression*).
- Substance abuse disorders.
- Chronic illness or pain.
- Prolonged stress (e.g., bullying, harassment, relationship trouble, difficulty in school).
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Knowing someone who has died by suicide.
- Exposure to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide.
- Stressful life events (e.g., death, divorce, unwanted pregnancy, abuse).
- Family history of suicide.
- Access to deadly means (e.g., guns, drugs).

*Some antidepressant medications can also increase the risk of depression or suicidal thoughts in teenagers. Check with your doctor.

Suicidal thoughts may occur if a teen feels:

- Trapped or hopeless.
- That they're a burden to others.
- Unbearable pain.
- Lonely, alienated, or isolated.
- Misunderstood or that they don't belong.
- Guilty or that they have failed to live up to expectations.
- That life isn't worth living.

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Warning Signs

Young people who are thinking about or planning suicide typically show warning signs such as:

- Increasing drug or alcohol use.
- Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Withdrawing.
- Showing rage and anger or talking about revenge.
- Having extreme mood swings.
- Writing notes or poems about death.
- Talking about suicide.
- Giving away valued possessions.
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye.

QUICKSTAT

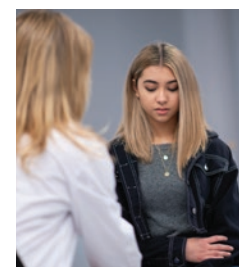
In 2023, 20% of U.S. high-school students seriously considered suicide and nearly 9% attempted it.

Creating a Supportive Environment

Today's youth deal with school pressure, social stress, and constant online noise. A peaceful home can help ease that often heavy load. Creating a supportive home environment for teen mental health takes patience, but it builds trust over time.

Listen, don't fix.

Teens often hold back when they feel judged or rushed, so let your teen finish their thoughts without jumping in. Ask open-ended questions like "What was the toughest part of your day today?" instead of "Are you OK?" That gives them room to open up. Set aside time to talk, not just when something feels wrong.



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Set clear, flexible routines.

Teens need structure, but they also need room to breathe. A clear routine helps reduce stress because your teen knows what to expect. Keep sleep and mealtimes as consistent as possible to support physical health and emotional balance. Add breaks from screens and space for quiet time during the day.

QUICKTIP

If your child or teen resists a set routine, involve them in building one. When they help shape the plan, they're likelier to stick to it.

Maintain a safe space.

Your teen's space can affect how they feel every day. A clean, organized room helps lower stress and gives them a sense of control. Let them decorate their space in ways that reflect who they are. When their home feels welcoming, your teen has one less thing to worry about.

Show support through actions.

Teens tend to notice your actions more than your words. Respect their need for space but stay nearby so they know you're available. Praise the effort they put into things, not just the results. Pay attention to small changes in sleep, appetite, or how they talk. These can show up before they admit anything's wrong.



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Seeking Outside Support

If your teen is dealing with anxiety, depression, or any other mental health concern right now, **you're not alone**. Still, you may wonder whether the symptoms are due to biological and social changes all young people go through, or something more.

How will I know if my teen is struggling?

The mental health symptoms you might see in your child or teen will be specific to them. But as a parent, you have a good sense of what their "normal" looks like.

Signs to watch out for include:

- Changes in sleep, weight, eating habits, or other everyday patterns.
- Loss of interest in things they love.
- Withdrawing more than usual from friends, family, and community.
- Canceling plans with friends with little or no explanation.
- Academic struggles that seem different or more intense (e.g., failing a favorite subject, refusing to do homework).
- Running thoughts or worries that won't leave them alone.
- A new set of friends you've never met before.
- Refusing to talk about what's bothering them, even after you've made it safe to discuss issues openly.
- Signs of drug, alcohol, or other substance use.
- Signs of self-harm (cuts, burns, etc.) they try to hide or can't fully explain.
- Sexual activity or interest that seems new or more intense.

Having just one symptom doesn't mean your teen is in full-blown crisis, but if you consistently see one or more of these signs, it's time to have a conversation about mental health.

QUICKFLIP
Flip to the "Talking with Teens" tab for tips on navigating tough conversations with your teen about their mental health.

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Substance Abuse

Substance use is a concern all on its own – one you should talk about with your teen even if you don't see signs of mental health issues. Drinking and drugs are often used to cope with difficult feelings or circumstances. This can signal deep emotional pain.

Why Teens Use

Substance use is common among teens. It can combine with mental health issues – and in most cases – make them worse. A young person may choose to experiment with tobacco, vaping, alcohol, or drugs for many reasons, including to:

- Relieve boredom.
- Ease their pain.
- Feel good.
- Feel grown up.
- Forget their troubles.
- Show their independence.
- Satisfy their curiosity.
- Belong to a specific group.

QUICKSTAT

- Approximately 15% of high-school students admit to having used street drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine, inhalants, heroin, meth, hallucinogens, or MDMA (also called ecstasy or molly).
- 14% report having misused prescription opioids.
- Nearly 30% say they've tried alcohol and 14% admit to binge drinking.

Is it OK to snoop?

Sometimes, parents who suspect their child is using drugs wonder whether it is OK to snoop in their bedrooms or go through their belongings. Only you can decide that, but keep in mind that you are suspicious for a reason – and your suspicions may be right.

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Warning Signs

Figuring out if your teen is using drugs can be challenging. Many signs of teen drug use are typical young adult behavior, but some may indicate mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

Spot the Signs of Drug Use

Behavior

- Changed relationships with family members or friends
- Absenteeism or a loss of interest in school, work, or other activities
- Avoids eye contact
- Goes out often; frequently breaks curfew
- Secretive with their phone
- Cash flow problems
- Has periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep

Physical Health

- Frequent sickness
- Unusually tired and/or lethargic
- Unable to speak intelligibly; slurred or rapid-fire speech
- Nosebleeds and/or runny nose (not from allergies or cold)
- Sores or spots around mouth
- Sudden or dramatic weight loss or gain
- Skin abrasions/bruises
- Frequent perspiration
- Seizures and/or vomiting

Mood and Appearance

- Sullen, withdrawn, depressed
- Unmotivated
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Inability to focus
- Smells of smoke; other unusual smells on breath or clothes
- Messier appearance and poor hygiene
- Frequently red or flushed cheeks
- Track marks on arms or legs (or sleeves in warm weather to hide marks)

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The Dos and Don'ts of Talking About Substance Use

The best way to ensure that your attempts at intervention have an impact is to have a conversation, **not** a confrontation. Remember: This is about your teen's health and well-being – not punishing bad behavior.

DO:

- Come from a place of love and concern, not anger.
- Keep a level head and speak calmly. Listen carefully without interrupting.
- Try not to judge so your teen feels they can be truthful.
- Promise that if they tell you the truth, there will be no immediate consequences, such as grounding.
- If they say they are trying substances, ask why. The "why" can help you understand where they might need help to address peer pressure, curiosity, anxiety, etc.
- Share your expectations that you don't want them using substances.

DON'T:

- Have a conversation if your teen is under the influence, on the way out the door, or getting ready for bed.
- Get defensive when they say something that feels like a personal attack – use it as a discussion point.
- Just take what they say at face value – listen to their tone of voice and pay attention to facial expressions and body language.
- Let the conversation get interrupted – give them your undivided attention.

QUICKNOTE

If things get too heated or emotional, there is nothing wrong with stopping the conversation. If both parties need to regroup, take a break and try another time.

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Setting Positive Expectations

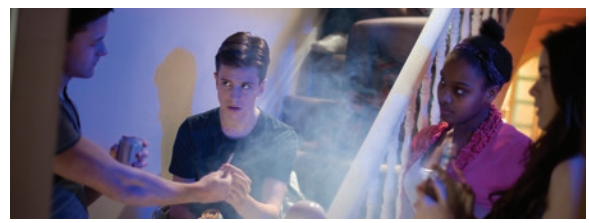
Start conversations about your values and expectations while your child is young. It may seem strange to talk about the dangers of drugs with your preschooler, but the ideas kids form at that age are the foundation for the decisions they make when they're older.

- Many kids start using tobacco by age 11 and are addicted by age 14.
- Between ages 9 and 13, children start to think that using alcohol is OK.
- At age 12 or 13, some kids are already abusing drugs like marijuana or prescription pain relievers.
- Many children have been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property.

The younger a child is when they first use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, the more likely they are to abuse or become dependent on those substances as an adult. Make sure your child knows from early on that you think it's important not to use drugs and to stay safe.

QUICKFACT

As children get older, their exposure and access to drugs increases, as does the likelihood that they or their friends will use drugs. By the time they graduate high school, 44% of American teens will have tried marijuana at least once.



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Modeling Healthy Behavior

Children learn what they see. Many of your teen's attitudes about substance abuse are shaped by your attitudes and actions. Drinking alcohol, vaping, and smoking cigarettes are also adult behaviors that young people like to "try on."

- Do not engage in illegal, unhealthy, or dangerous drug use. Even very young children are influenced by adult behaviors.
- Don't involve your child in your use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs by asking them to get you a beer, light a cigarette, or taste your wine.
- Point out everyday examples of poor behavior and consequences linked to substance use or abuse.
- Make your home safe. Do not have people in the house who use or abuse drugs or alcohol.
- If you have a problem with tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, speak to your doctor about getting help.

QUICKNOTE

Many parents are uninformed, in denial, or scared to confront the realities of drug use. Permissive attitudes, particularly when combined with poor communication and role modeling, can lead teens into unhealthy relationships with substances.

Other Role Models

Parenting can feel overwhelming, especially if you work outside the home or are a single parent. If possible, find other family members or caregivers who can serve as positive role models in your teen's life.

Grandparents, for example, can bring a calm, seasoned approach to interactions with their grandchildren. They can use their positions of trust to reinforce the same lessons in self-respect and healthy living that you are trying to teach your children.

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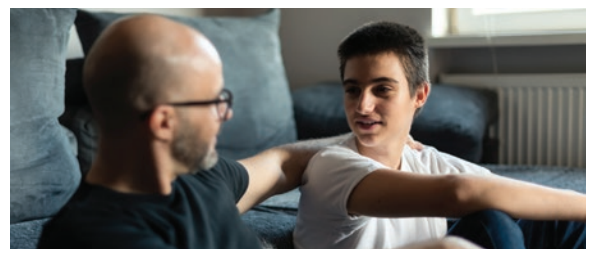
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Coping Skills and Positive Outlets

One reason young people abuse substances is to cope with stress. Some kids believe drinking or using drugs will cheer them up, help them forget about their problems, or solve their social challenges.

Parents who are involved in their children's lives are more likely to notice signs of stress and be able to help their teen cope in healthy ways.

- Encourage your teen to express themselves.
- Promote healthy eating, sleep, and exercise patterns so these habits last a lifetime.
- Let your teen know that you also experience hurt, anger, and stress. Talk about how you cope.
- Teach relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, that they can use to calm down.
- Set goals based on your teen's abilities.
- Teach your teen that it's OK to be angry and that it's important to let the anger go.
- Help your teen express anger without resorting to verbal or physical violence.
- Hug your teen before or after a stressful situation.
- Show confidence in your teen's ability to handle problems and tackle new challenges.



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Social Media and Online Safety

Social media is a big part of daily life for teenagers. It lets them create online identities, chat with friends, and build social networks. This type of connection may especially help teens who:

- Are lonely or lack social support offline.
- Are going through a stressful time.
- Belong to groups that often face barriers, such as racial groups or those who are differently abled.
- Have long-term medical conditions.

QUICKSTAT

In the U.S., 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and 45% consider themselves to be online "almost constantly."



Healthy Social Media Use

Sometimes, social media platforms help teens:

- Express themselves and connect with other teens.
- Learn how their peers cope with challenging life situations.
- Ask for help or seek care for symptoms of mental health conditions.

These healthy effects can help teens who are prone to depression stay connected to others. Humorous or light-hearted posts may help a struggling person cope with a challenging day.

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Unhealthy Social Media Use

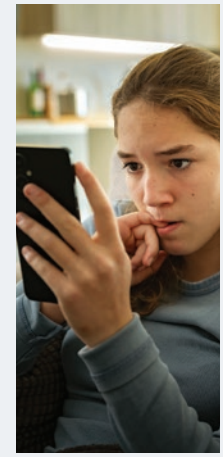
Social media use may have negative effects on some teens. It might:

- Distract from homework, exercise, and family activities.
- Disrupt sleep.
- Lead to information that is false or promotes hate.
- Become a means to spread rumors or share too much personal information.
- Lead to the formation of unrealistic views about other people's lives or bodies.
- Expose some teens to online predators or cyberbullies, who might try to exploit or extort them, raising the risk of anxiety and depression.

Is my teen addicted to social media?

Talk to your child's doctor if you think they have symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns related to social media use. Also talk with your doctor if your teen shows any of the following symptoms:

- Uses social media even when wanting to stop.
- Uses it so much that school, sleep, activities, or relationships suffer.
- Often spends more time on social media platforms than intended.
- Lies in order to use social media.



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Questions to Consider

Time

- How much time is my teen spending online? Is it taking away from healthy offline activities, such as seeing friends, reading, and sleeping?
- Are there healthy limits I can set regarding online time, such as limiting screen time to specific times of the day or week?

Content

- Am I aware of what devices and content my teen has access to?
- Are they getting something meaningful and positive out of the content they are looking at, creating, or sharing? How do I know?
- Are there healthier ways my teen could engage online? (finding recipes, researching options for a family outing, chatting with a relative, etc.)
- Is being online riskier for my teen than for some others? (i.e., does my teen have a mental health condition that might make them react more strongly to certain kinds of content?)

Impact

- How does my teen feel about the time they spend online?
- Is my teen engaging because they want to, or because they feel like they have to?
- How can I create space for open conversations with my teen about their experiences online?
- How do I feel about my own use of technology? Can I be a better role model?

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Protecting Your Teen

While you may not be able to monitor all your child's online activities, there are steps you can take to protect them from harmful digital behavior like cyberbullying, **sextortion**, and screen addiction.

- Stay up to date on the latest apps, social media platforms, and digital slang used by today's youth.
- Set rules and limits as needed to help prevent social media from getting in the way of activities, sleep, meals, or homework.
- Turn on privacy settings to help keep your teen from sharing personal information that they didn't mean to.
- Follow or "friend" their social accounts. As your teen gets older, you can monitor their social media profiles less, depending on their maturity level.
- Have regular talks about social media. Ask how it makes them feel and offer any advice.
- Remind your teen that it's hurtful to gossip, spread rumors, bully, or harm someone's reputation – online or otherwise.
- Explain the dangers of sharing personal information online (e.g., addresses, passwords, banking information).

QUICKTERM

Sextortion is a form of sexual exploitation where a young person is threatened or blackmailed (most often with the possibility of sharing a nude/sexual image of them publicly) by a person who demands money, more sexual content, or sexual activity from the youth.

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Cyberbullying

We all want to believe our children are happy and well-behaved, but it is vital that we pay attention to what is really going on in their lives. This is especially important online. Unfortunately, children rarely report cyberbullying to an adult. It is crucial to recognize the warning signs.

Warning Signs

A child may be the victim of cyberbullying if:

- They avoid the computer, cell phone, and other devices.
- They appear stressed when receiving email, DMs, or texts.
- They withdraw from family and friends or are reluctant to attend school and other activities that they previously enjoyed.
- They express an increased level of sadness, anger, frustration, or worry, and their overall tolerance is reduced.
- They hide their screen or device when others are near and avoid talking about what they are doing on their device.
- They create new social media accounts and delete old ones.
- Their grades decline.
- Their eating or sleeping habits change.



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Build Strong Digital Boundaries

The responsibility of mitigating the potential harms of social media should not be placed solely on the shoulders of parents and caregivers, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of harm. Screens shape a big part of your teen's day, so it helps to set limits together.

Start with open communication.

Young people often resist any move adults make to curb their freedom, so aim for a non-judgmental approach.

Have your teen guide you by asking questions:

- What types of media do you enjoy lately?
- What types of content do you like on social media?
- Do you ever see content that makes you anxious, worried, or uncomfortable?
- How do you limit your viewing of content that you don't want to see?
- Do you sometimes see content that looks totally fake?

QUICKSCAN

Use this free tool to create guidelines that reflect your children's ages, needs, and interests. Scan here:

Challenge the idea that people should be perfect.

Has your teen ever been influenced by an influencer or feel jealous of peers whose social media posts show an ideal life? It may help to acknowledge that comparing ourselves to others – while natural – can be harmful if not checked.

Create a family media plan.

A family media plan can promote open family discussion and rules about media use and include topics such as balancing screen/online time, content boundaries, and not disclosing personal information.

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Designate tech-free zones.

Since electronics can disrupt sleep, consider restricting screen use for at least one hour before bed and through the night. Help your child develop social skills and nurture their in-person relationships by encouraging offline connections with others and making unplugged interactions a priority.

Empower teens to be responsible online participants.

Discuss the benefits and risks of social media as well as the importance of respecting privacy and protecting personal information. Talk about who they are connecting with, their privacy settings, their virtual experiences, and how they are spending their time online.

Report cyberbullying and online exploitation.

Talk about their reporting options and provide support, without judgment, if your child or teen tells/shows you that they are being harassed through email, text message, online games, or social media, or have been contacted by an adult seeking private images or asking them to perform intimate or sexual acts. You or your teen can report cyberbullying to the school and/or online platform, or your local law enforcement.

Online Monitoring

Together, parents and children can explore safe ways to use technology. Monitoring online activity can be difficult, but you must remain vigilant of online harassment, especially if you have younger children.

While specific settings vary based on the parental controls you use, most help you do things like:

- Manage how much time your teen spends online.
- Restrict the type of content that can be accessed.
- Get information about the websites and apps that are accessed.
- Limit who your teen can communicate with.
- Restrict purchases.

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Talking with Teens

Good communication between parents and teenagers is the foundation of strong family bonds. Your child is an individual with hopes, fears, likes, dislikes, and special talents. The better you know them, the easier it will be to guide them toward positive relationships and activities.

Without strong communication skills, children often struggle to develop friendships, to have positive interactions, and to navigate life's ups and downs.

QUICKTIP

Talk with your teen every day. If you communicate easily about day-to-day events, your teen is more likely to open up about serious issues.

Communication Skills

Open communication helps you catch problems early, support positive behavior, and be aware of what is happening in your teen's life.

Ask questions. Children have a lot to share when they feel that their opinions are valued. Ask for their input on family activities, problems, and current events.

Practice active listening. A big part of communication is listening. Paraphrase what they tell you to show that you're listening and to promote self-reflection.

Validate feelings. Minimizing your teen's feelings will create distance between you and shut down communication. They will feel more comfortable talking to you about issues and situations when they know you will listen without making accusations.

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Having Hard Conversations

Here are some points to consider as you open the door to talking about mental health. This should be a series of conversations and "check ins" that you have with your teen on a regular basis.

- **Make it safe to discuss tough issues.** Kids often avoid talking about touchy subjects, especially if they expect to be judged, lectured, or punished. Emphasize that these conversations will take place in a judgment-free zone and that you want to understand what they're going through.
- **Listen more than you speak.** Nothing will send your teen running the other way faster than failing to hear them out. Try to manage your own fears during the conversation and try not to filter what's been said through your own life's lens.
- **Accept some silence.** Your child might not know what to say at first, especially if they've been trying to hide how they're feeling or manage things on their own. Explain that even though you're worried, you can wait for them to think about what they'd like you to know. If they don't come back to you, try restarting the conversation in a few days.
- **Realize that mental health stigma still exists.** Despite much progress, some people still believe that having a mental health condition means they are broken, untrustworthy, etc. In fact, many don't seek treatment due to fear of what others will think.

Active Listening

Active listening starts with you giving your teen your full attention. Active listening reduces misunderstandings, improves parent-child trust, and encourages the honest sharing of thoughts and feelings.

Engaging in active listening does not mean never giving teens much-needed advice or discipline – it just means ensuring that young people feel heard and understood during the process.

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Strategies to Consider

Ask thoughtful questions. Take the time to dig deeper into why your teen feels the way they do by asking open-ended questions (questions which allow for a variety of responses rather than implying there is one "correct" response).

Put empathy first. Try to see issues from your teen's point of view rather than immediately assessing them from an adult perspective. This is especially important if your teen has done something you don't agree with. From there, you can devise a solution rather than simply punishing them.

Practice attentive body language. Parents, like teens, are often distracted (e.g., work demands, chores, phone calls). It's important to take note of this behavior when talking with your teen. Make eye contact and know when to give an affirming nod, encouraging smile, or look of understanding.

Watch how your teen is responding. Just like your own use of body language can convey a great deal to your child, your teen's non-verbal communication can provide you with insight. Their body language should be relaxed and attentive. If the conversation ends with a smile and a hug, odds are good that your teen feels supported and listened to.

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Teens in Crisis

Recognizing that your teen is battling a mental health crisis can be difficult. You may not be certain what constitutes a crisis versus a "bad day" or a "phase." You may feel scared or unsure of how to protect them. Being aware of the following signs is vital for early intervention.

Behavioral Changes

Has your teen withdrawn from friends and family? Have they lost interest in hobbies they once enjoyed? Changes in sleep patterns, increased irritability or aggression, substance use, or any form of self-harm are warning signs to take seriously.

Mood Changes

Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, anxiety, extreme mood swings, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, and difficulty concentrating can all point to a mental health crisis. Your teen might express feelings of despair, experience intense anxiety, or constantly worry about things beyond their control.

Physical Changes

Changes in appetite or weight, unexplained aches and pains, and constant fatigue can also be indicators of a mental health crisis that has transformed into a potential eating disorder.

QUICKNOTE

It's important to understand that these are potential warning signs, **not** a definite diagnosis. Noting patterns and significant changes in your teen's behavior is key. Multiple signs occurring together, or any drastic shifts in their day-to-day routines and moods, warrant immediate concern and investigation.

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My Teen Needs Help: What Now?

Supporting your child or teen through a mental health crisis goes beyond the initial intervention. Ongoing love, understanding, and support is crucial for their recovery.

Immediate Danger

If you feel that your child's or someone else's life is in danger, this is an emergency – take immediate action. Call **911** (or a local crisis line) or go to your nearest emergency room.
Never leave them alone.

No Immediate Danger

Keep in mind that even if it's not a physical emergency, it is still an urgent situation that needs to be addressed immediately.

QUICKCONTACT

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has crisis professionals standing by 24/7.

Call or text: **988**

- Create a safe space for them to talk about their feelings and actively listen. It's OK to ask questions, but most importantly, reassure them that you are here to support them.
- If your child is already receiving treatment, get in touch with their psychiatrist or therapist. They can provide guidance on what to do next.
- If your child is not currently receiving treatment, they will need a mental health assessment. Primary care physicians are often able to provide screenings and referrals.
- Proactively create a crisis plan in case your teen's mental health issue ever becomes an emergency.

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Crisis Support

Talk to your pediatrician.
If you are concerned, talk to your pediatrician or other health care professional about whether they think your child could benefit from seeing a mental health professional. They can also provide screenings or referrals in your community.

Seek help from your teen's school counselor or nurse.
School personnel are in a unique position, since teens spend a great deal of time at school, to provide input, guidance, and referrals to services.

Talk to a friend or relative in the same situation.
Sometimes, if a friend or family member has their child under professional care, they might have suggestions about how to get an appointment with their mental health center.

If necessary, go to your local emergency room.
If your child is experiencing an acute situation and you are concerned about their safety or the safety of others, go to your local emergency room. There, you will get an immediate medical evaluation and suggestions for treatment.

Resources for Parents

Mental Health America
https://mhanational.org

The Kids Mental Health Foundation
www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org

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Support and Resources

Hotlines

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
Call or text: **988**
https://988lifeline.org

Crisis Text Line
Text **HOME** to **741741**
https://www.crisistextline.org

The Trevor Project
LGBTQ+ Youth Helpline: **866-488-7386**
www.thetrevorproject.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
National Helpline: **800-662-HELP (4357)**
www.samhsa.gov
Find a treatment facility: **https://findtreatment.gov**

Childhelp
National Child Abuse Hotline: **800-422-4453**
www.childhelp.org

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)
National Sexual Assault Hotline: **800-656-HOPE (4673)**
www.rainn.org

Love Is Respect
National Domestic Violence Hotline: **866-331-9474**
Text: **LOVEIS** to **22522**
www.loveisrespect.org

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Mental Health Apps

The following apps are available for both iPhone and Android devices. Visit the App Store or Google Play to download. Apps can be a useful supplementary tool, but they are not a standalone replacement for professional care, especially for those in crisis.



Feeling Good Teens

Feeling Good Teens uses short audio tracks to help let go of worry; improve sleep; and develop self-esteem, resilience, and goal-focused motivation.



Mindshift

Mindshift offers anxiety relief strategies and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) tools to help reduce worry, stress, and panic.



What's Up

What's Up uses CBT and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to help with depression, anxiety, stress, and more.



Woebot

Woebot can help you manage situations with step-by-step guidance through a 24/7 quick chat function.

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Youth Mental Health & Safety

Adolescence is a unique time that can present many challenges. From social media influence to anxiety about the future to peer pressure, these transformative years can include a number of problems that impact mental health.

In this guide, parents and caregivers will find practical information and strategies to help them:

- Support their child through the ups and downs of growing up.
- Identify warning signs of substance abuse.
- Encourage healthy digital habits and social media use.
- Have positive, productive conversations about mental health.

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