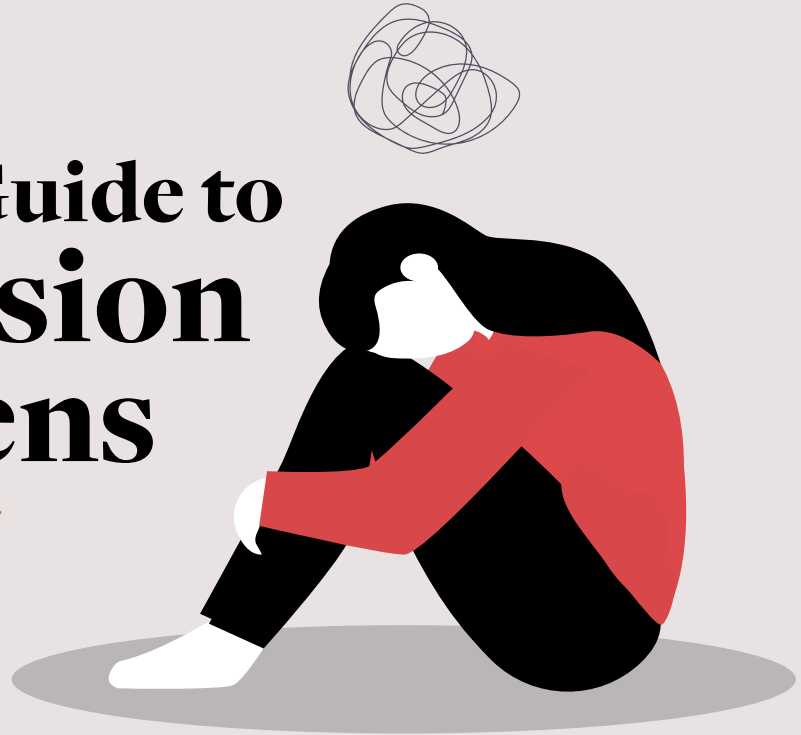


A Parent's Guide to Depression in Teens

By Nicole Kear



Teens often experience their first depressive episode between ages 16 to 19. The 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that 20% of teens had a major depressive episode in the past year. Still, major depressive disorder (MDD) is difficult to diagnose, even in irritable, withdrawn teenagers who no longer enjoy their favorite activities.

Untreated depression in teens may be serious. Suicide was the second leading cause of death in 2020 among youth ages 10 to 14 and the third leading cause of death among adolescents ages 15 to 24, according to the CDC.

Highly effective interventions for depression exist, yet only 41% of teens with depression receive treatment. This may be because parents can't differentiate typical teen moodiness from depression. Depression also presents differently in teens than it does in adults. Adults stop eating; teens will eat everything in sight. Adults sleep more; teens will sleep less. Adults lose interest in sex; adolescents become hypersexual. **The most common symptom of depression in teens is irritability—not sadness.** Also, teens may resist treatment because of hopelessness, confidentiality concerns, and stigma around mental illness. Accessibility to

providers, therapist shortages, cost, and lack of insurance also exacerbate roadblocks to treatment.

How To Help Teens Resistant to Treatment

- Ask your teen to talk to friends who have been through depression and have come out healthier.
- Ask your teen, "If you saw one of your friends struggling the way you were, what would you say and do?" This reminds teens that they have friends they care about and who care about them.
- Remind your teen that their hopelessness is a symptom of an illness. They're the same person they were six months ago, someone precious to their family and friends, with a bright future.
- Have your teen speak to people with whom they have a warm and trusting relationship (i.e., teacher, coach, pastor, rabbi, grandparent, etc.). These people do not need any special training. They just need to be able to tell the teen that they are loved and have a promising future.

Highly effective interventions for depression exist. Speak with your doctor to figure out an optimal treatment plan.

The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is free, confidential, and available 24/7. Call or Text 988, 988lifeline.org

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