



“How do I talk to my teen
about **mental health**?”

**Start with
the facts.**

**The best time to talk to your teens
about mental health is *before* early
adolescence starts.**

Mental health is important at every stage of life, and especially
from childhood to adolescence.

**The most common mental illnesses presenting in teens include
generalized anxiety, social phobias, depression and behavioral disorders.**

Although symptoms vary with diagnosis, early warning signs include: new onset of guilt, changes in energy level, changes in concentration or task completion, changes in motivation and thoughts of suicide.

**It is important to remember that mental illness in teens is more
common than people think, and it is also very treatable.** Early diagnosis and appropriate services for teens and their families can make a difference in the lives of the teens with mental disorders. There is a range of options for treating mental illness, including identifying stressors, counseling and prescribing psychiatric medications.

When seeking mental health treatment options for your teenager, it is best to start with your pediatrician or family physician first. Upon referral to an outside source, caregivers should consider asking questions related to the provider's experience working with teens with similarly presenting issues, their approach to treatment, duration of treatments, and how progress will be measured.

Compounding the Problem

Teens who struggle with mental illness may turn to alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism. In teens, experimentation can accelerate to addiction in rates much faster than in adults.



Now That You Know, Where Do You Start?

Learning these facts is important. But it's just as crucial to create a plan for an open dialogue and to be mindful of engaging your teen with respect. Positive role modeling, compassion and the truth will go a long way to help you start communicating effectively.

**Use the following steps and resources to start
your own Communication Action Plan.** ►



Fast Facts

- Approximately 11% of 12-17 year olds experience generalized anxiety.*
- More than 1 in 10 teens between 12 and 17 years of age experience an episode of major depression.*
- Approximately, 7% of teens between 12 and 17 years of age experience behavioral disorders such as ADHD.*
- 75 to 80% of U.S. teens in need of mental health services do not receive them.*

Start Here:



Tips For Success

- Be empathetic.
- Be genuine.
- Ask and answer questions.
- Be an attentive listener.
- Don't trivialize their feelings.
- Take their concerns seriously.
- Commit to patience.
- Share facts and resources.
- Ask your teen what they need.
- Remind and repeat.

1 Before You Talk: Be Ready to Listen.

A conversation is a two-way street. Mutual respect, transparency, compassion and hearing what your teen says will go a long way toward giving your facts and position more clout. When it comes to sensitive issues like mental health, getting a conversation started can be difficult. Start here. IMPORTANT: No one resource, or document is a magic bullet. Assemble all the available tools at your disposal into your playbook. Start with the website by Mental Health America: **Talking To Adolescents And Teens: Starting The Conversation***

2 The Conversation: Look for Your Moment.

There is no “one size fits all” time or way to initiate a conversation like this. Your child’s responses are likely to be affected in part by their age and maturity level. The best results come from collaboration. Watch for the right lead-in. Avoid confrontational tendencies. Having patience and empathy will build trust. The JED Foundations breaks down the steps to have an effective conversation in this guide: **What To Do If You’re Concerned About Your Teen’s Mental Health***

3 You've Gotten Their Attention: Now What?

Your teen may be concerned with the stigma of mental illness or what that means for how others see them. Find out what they think about mental illness and dispel the myths that plague the conditions. Utilize the National Alliance on Mental Illness’s resource on myth busting to facilitate a factual and healthy discussion related to mental illness: **Dispelling Myths On Mental Illness***

4 Great Start: Don't Stop!

All these pieces can help to formulate a communication plan for you and your teen, but poor teenage mental health can lead to a host of negative outcomes such as reduced school performance, substance misuse, risk-taking behaviors, and suicide. Therefore, one talk is probably not going to be enough. Your child is going to need ongoing support to help them address their mental health concerns. Keep the lines of communication open and the conversation alive. Discover resources together and encourage them to be part of the process. One resource available to help your teen feel empowered to address their illness is the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine’s list of **Youth Friendly Mental Health Online Resources And Apps***



Although there are many misconceptions about mental illness, the truth is out there and available to you. All these resources and more are available on the **PASStart/Mental Health**. Use our collection of links and tools to create a strategy that will engage and empower you and your teen. They’re all designed to help you get started.



* For an expanded set of additional resources, all data citations and bonus interactive materials, click on the QR code above or visit pastart.org/mental-health

Learn More. **PASStart.org**

 **Commonwealth Prevention Alliance**

Paid for with PA taxpayer dollars.

Licensed material is being used for illustrative purposes only, and any person depicted in the licensed material is a model.