

Start with the facts.

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



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

Mental health positively shapes every stage of life, starting from childhood through adolescence.



The most common mental illnesses presenting in teens include generalized anxiety, social phobias, depression and behavioral disorders. All of which are manageable with the right support.

Symptoms can differ by diagnosis, but early indicators that may signal a need for support include new feelings of guilt, shifts in energy or concentration, 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.

Getting help early and finding the right support can really change the game for teens facing mental health challenges, and it's a journey families don't have to face alone. There are lots of ways to support teens dealing with mental health concerns from understanding what might be causing stress to exploring counseling or considering medication if needed.

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 managing their mental health might sometimes explore various coping mechanisms, including substance use can lead to addictive behaviors more rapidly 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.



Fast Facts

- About 12% of adolescents are gaining valuable life skills as they navigate and manage anxiety.*
- Roughly, 1 in 10 teens are growing stronger by overcoming depression.*
- Approximately, 8% of young people benefit from educational reforms providing targeted support for behavioral disorders like ADHD.*
- Policy advocacy and community support efforts are expanding mental health services to 80% of underserved teens.*

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

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

Communication is key—it's a two-way street. Building trust, being open, showing empathy, and truly listening to your teen can make a big difference in how they receive your guidance. Talking about tough topics like mental health might seem daunting, but it's a crucial step. Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. Gather all the tools and resources you have to create your own strategy for support. Start with the website by Mental Health America: **Talking To Adolescents And Teens: Starting The Conversation***

2

There's no 'universal' time or way to start a conversation like this. Your child's age and maturity will play a role in how they respond. The key is to work together. Look for natural openings, steer clear of confrontation, and above all, be patient and empathetic to 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

Have an open conversation to understand their thoughts on mental health and work together to dispel any misconceptions. 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

Creating a communication plan with your teen is vital. While it might take more than one conversation, it's crucial for their well-being. Poor mental health in teens can impact their schoolwork, increase risk factors, and even affect their safety. That's why ongoing support is key. Keep those conversations flowing, explore resources together, and empower them to take an active role in their mental health journey with the right support. 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 [PAStart.org/Mental Health](https://pastart.org/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



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