

Talking to your Depressed Teen

Adolescence can be a very difficult time. Adolescents have to learn to begin asserting their independence from their parents, make independent decisions for the first time, grapple with their own emerging sexuality and gender issues. Although bad moods are expected in these years, depression is different.

Depressed adolescents may sulk, get into trouble at school, become irritable and negative and often feel misunderstood. It is important to note how different the behaviour is from their usual self. It is unfortunately not unusual for depressed adolescents to also experience other conditions such as anxiety, eating disorders or substance abuse. The risk of suicide among adolescents is also high.

Depression is likely to continue into adulthood if left untreated. Thus, if you suspect your adolescent is experiencing depression it is important to seek help as soon as possible.

Tips for talking to your depressed adolescent

- *Talk to your child:* because depressed teens feel misunderstood, it is important you listen carefully. You don't have to talk about depression necessarily, but it is important for them to know you are there to talk to and to listen.
- *Offer emotional support:* Once again because teens feel misunderstood, it is important for them to know you offer them understanding and encouragement. Remember to show patience.
- *Be mindful not to ever discount their feelings.* Point out realities when needed and offer hope.
- **Never** ignore comments about suicide. Look out for comments such as "everyone would be better off without me", "no-one would miss me if I died", "I wish I could sleep and never wake up".
- *Remind yourself and your child that in time and with treatment, depression will lift.*

How to get help

Your Family Doctor/ General Practitioner is a great first point of call. He/ she has established relationships with Psychologists and Psychiatrists highly trained in treating depression. If they believe your child would benefit from seeing one, they will make a referral through a Mental Health Treatment Plan and will recommend the right person for them.

Our Psychologists at Vida Psychology have extensive experience in helping adolescents with depression.

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1/508 Queensberry Street
North Melbourne, Victoria 3051
Phone 03 9328 8200
Fax 03 9328 8711
Email Carmen@vidapsychology.com.au
www.vidapsychology.com.au
ABN 80 161 627 384