

When Is A Moody Teenager A Cause For Concern?

(NAPSA)—Most teenagers are sad or moody at times. But depression is something different. A person with depression feels sad or down most of the time for a period of at least two weeks, and loses interest in activities he or she once enjoyed. Depression is a serious condition that can impact a teen's performance at school or work, as well as his or her interactions with family and friends. Studies show that one out of every eight teenagers has depression. When depression is severe—known as major depressive disorder, or MDD—it can cause great harm, including an increased risk of suicide.

The good news is that there are tools to help identify depression in teens, and there are effective treatments to help teenagers with depression get better.

How Do I Know If

My Teenager Is Depressed?

Parents can't always tell the difference between normal mood changes in their teen and depression. Some teens may appear disruptive, irritable, angry, agitated or withdrawn rather than sad when they are depressed.

Other signs of depression in teens include complaints of pain or fatigue, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, overwhelming feelings of guilt, irresponsible or reckless behavior, eating very little or too much resulting in rapid weight loss or weight gain, changes in sleep patterns, preoccupation with death or dying, a sudden drop in grades, and withdrawing from friends.

However, your teen may have depression even if you have not noticed any signs of a problem. Therefore, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recently recommended that primary care clinicians screen all adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 for major depressive disorder, regardless of whether the teen or the parents raised this as a concern.

What Should I Do If I Think My Teenager Is Depressed?

Someone with depression can't simply "snap out of it." If you have



Reach out to your teen's primary care clinician with any concerns about mood or behavior.

any concerns about your teen's mood, behavior or functioning, you should contact his or her primary care clinician. A clinician can screen for depression and, if needed, help you and your teen figure out the best plan for treatment.

What Are The Treatment Options For Teenagers With Depression?

Depression in teenagers can be effectively treated in a number of ways, including with counseling or therapy, medications, support programs, or a combination of these approaches. The best treatment for a teen depends on how severe his or her depression is as well as other considerations, such as other health conditions, preferences for treatment, and other issues going on in the teen's life.

Determining which treatment option is best for your teen should be a shared decision between the clinician, the teen, and you as the parent. During this conversation, make sure all your questions and concerns are addressed. Use this time to become fully informed about available treatments so that you can decide together with your teen what options are best.

Some primary care practices can treat teens with depression, while others will refer teens to mental health providers in the community and then follow up to ensure they get the care they need. Your primary care clinician along with you as the parent should continue to monitor your teenager on an ongoing basis to ensure that the chosen treatment is helping. If you have any concerns, you should talk with your teen's pri-

mary care clinician to discuss making any changes to the treatment plan.

Are Antidepressants Safe For Teenagers?

Medications used to treat depression, known as antidepressants, are effective but are also known to have side effects. The FDA warns that antidepressants can increase the risk of suicidal thinking and behavior in children and adolescents with depression and other psychiatric disorders, although this is rare. For this reason, the use of antidepressants in teenage patients requires close monitoring and follow-up by a clinician. Parents can help by monitoring their teen's behavior and alerting the clinician if they notice changes.

What About Depression In Kids 11 Years Or Younger?

While some kids can experience depression before age 12, there have been very few studies on screening for and treating depression in this age group. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force found that there is not enough evidence to recommend for or against screening all kids 11 years old or younger, and is calling for more research in this area. However, it is important to take any concern about depression seriously, regardless of the age of the child, and parents who have a concern about their child's mood or behavior should talk with their child's primary care clinician.

Recommendations To Protect Your Health

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is an independent group of national experts in primary care, prevention, and evidence-based medicine. The aim of the Task Force's work is to evaluate and identify critical preventive health services that a primary care clinician can perform.

For more information on the Task Force and to read the full reports on "Screening for Depression in Children and Adolescents," "Screening for Depression in Adults" and "Suicide Risk in Adolescents, Adults and Older Adults," please visit www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org.