

Mental Health of Teenagers: Danger Signs to Watch Out For



Adolescence is not easy. It affects not only the teenager but also parents. The teenager undergoes many changes, including sexual, physical, hormonal, emotional, intellectual, and social – the combined pressures of all these changes can often become overwhelming for them and may lead to a number of mental health issues.

Mental health problems are a major concern as some can be life threatening. Here are a few guidelines for parents and caretakers to positively identify any mental health issues that their teen may be suffering from.

Mental Health Problems Are Treatable

First of all, it is imperative to understand that mental health conditions can be treated. You can speak to a pediatrician, the local health department, the school's representatives, and health care professionals regarding the treatment options available to you. This requires the understanding that mental health isn't an individual issue, but it's a family issue and the support of family is strongly encouraged and accepted. This is important for the teen to open his or her heart to proper treatment and counseling.

Keeping an Eye Open: Danger Signs to Look Out For

Excessive sleeping that is beyond the typical teenage fatigue. This could indicate substance abuse or depression.

- Loss of self-esteem
- Unexpected decline in their academic performance
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Significant personality shifts, such as excessive anger and aggressiveness

Key Mental Health Issues for Teens

Some of the key mental health issues that teens need to be monitored for are:

1. Depression
2. Eating disorders
3. Drug abuse

Depression

While every human being experiences the 'blues', depression is something far more serious and requires immediate attention. Some of the symptoms to watch out for are:

- Changes in the sleeping patterns
- Excessive moodiness and/or unexpected weeping
- Eating habits that cause weight gain/loss
- Excessive secrecy or paranoia
- Self-mutilation
- Excessive isolation
- Abandonment of social groups and friends
- Obsessive concerns for body image

Eating disorders

Depression can often cause eating disorders. The following conditions may be a result of such disorders:

- **Anorexia** – averting food and significant changes in their eating habits.
- **Bulimia** – forced vomiting after eating food. You need to be on the lookout for significant weight loss without any changes in their eating habits.

Drug Abuse

Peer pressure combined with mental issues can be very forceful in leading adolescents in trying out different drugs, including alcohol. In addition to knowing the physical and behavioral signs of drug abuse, parents and caretakers should also:

Stay alert for abuse of prescription drugs: According to AAP, abuse of prescription drugs stands second after alcohol and marijuana abuse. Vicodin and Xanax are the most commonly abused drugs.

Understand that over-the-counter (OTC) drugs can also be abused. Teenagers often misuse cough and cold medications that contain sedatives.

If you have any concerns regarding the health of your child – both mental and physical – you should first address your child. Opening the channels of communication is a great way that can pave way for a better understanding between you and them.

If this does not work, then it is strongly recommended that professional health care staff

be involved along with school management in order to control the situation before it gets any worse.

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