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Does Your Teen or Young Adult Need Help?

A Parent's Guide

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Does Your Teen or Young Adult Need Therapy?

A Parent's Guide

Today, teenagers and young adults face stressors in their homes, schools, and social circles most of us didn't have to worry about while growing up. Between the constant comparison with one another on social media and the unprecedented state of our world today, it's no wonder 1 in 5 teens suffers from severe anxiety or depression.

But how do you know if your teenager or young adult has a mental illness or if they are simply an emerging adult with changing hormones?

Do you ever ask yourself, "Is my son just being a moody teenager, or does he actually need help?" Or "Is my daughter acting rebellious as she tries to be an independent adult, or is she crying out for help?"

You're not alone.

Parents just like you ask questions like these every day. You don't want to smother your son or daughter with excessive concern, but you also don't want to let something serious go untreated. But not intervening in your teen's mental health issues could have serious consequences. So what do you do?

SIGNS YOUR TEENAGER OR YOUNG ADULT MAY NEED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

One crucial thought you should keep in mind when trying to figure out if your son or daughter needs the help of a mental health professional is:

Depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses are not a choice your son or daughter makes. They are a serious mental health disorder, similar to a serious medical condition that requires professional treatment.

While it's normal for any teen or young adult to deal with plain old mood swings and sadness from time to time, it is beneficial to maintain regular communication to determine whether it's something more. Peer pressure, changing hormones, academic expectations, and social stressors can lead to your child developing anxiety or depression.

Not all teens and young adults display the same signs and symptoms of mental health issues. But you know your child better than anyone. Take note of any significant changes in their emotions and behaviors to see if they could benefit from professional help.

Some signs your child may need to see a mental health professional include:

- Feeling sad, hopeless, anxious, fearful, or angry for an extended period
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Frequent talk about death and suicide
- Trouble concentrating and making decisions
- Displaying self-harming behaviors
- Decline in academic performance
- Acting out sexually
- Feeling restless with an inability to settle down or focus
- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Running away from home
- Extreme moodiness or anger
- Refusing to go to school due to frequent "illness" (stomach or headaches)

If you've noticed any of the above issues with your teen or young adult, don't wait to reach out for help. Many parents may be reluctant and choose to wait to see if the problems "resolve themselves." But if your child does need help, their psychological and behavioral issues will only worsen and could lead to life-threatening situations if not treated.

And the sooner you get help for your son or daughter, the better. Early intervention can make a substantial difference and could prevent potentially life-threatening situations.



Why Your Child May Suffer From Depression, Anxiety, or Other Mental Health Issues

Your child is not choosing to have a mental health issue. They aren't acting out just to spite you. Mental health disorders are just that – disorders. Children and adults alike suffer from mental health concerns worldwide. In fact, according to Our World in Data, in 2018, approximately 970 million people around the world had a mental illness or substance abuse disorder. And that's before the pandemic hit.

Your son or daughter is far from alone in their fight against mental illness. The science behind exactly why they develop depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns is difficult to pinpoint. But scientists have narrowed down the causes to three separate factors.

Biological Factors

Brain chemistry:

Some mental illnesses are caused by the brain's neurotransmitter function. That means if your son or daughter's brain is wired a certain way, they may be more susceptible to developing a mental illness. But that doesn't mean it's impossible to retrain the brain. Many therapy models have been proven to do just that: retrain the brain to create more positive, less anxiety-driven thought patterns.

Genetics:

Your teen or young adult may be more likely to develop mental health issues if there is a history of mental illness in your family. Some experts believe certain conditions are linked to genetic markers passed down from one generation to the next. That's not to say your child definitely inherited a mental illness from you. They may just be more susceptible due to their genetic profile. Other factors such as a traumatic event or unusual levels of stress can cause a mental illness to arise when combined with a genetic predisposition.

Infections:

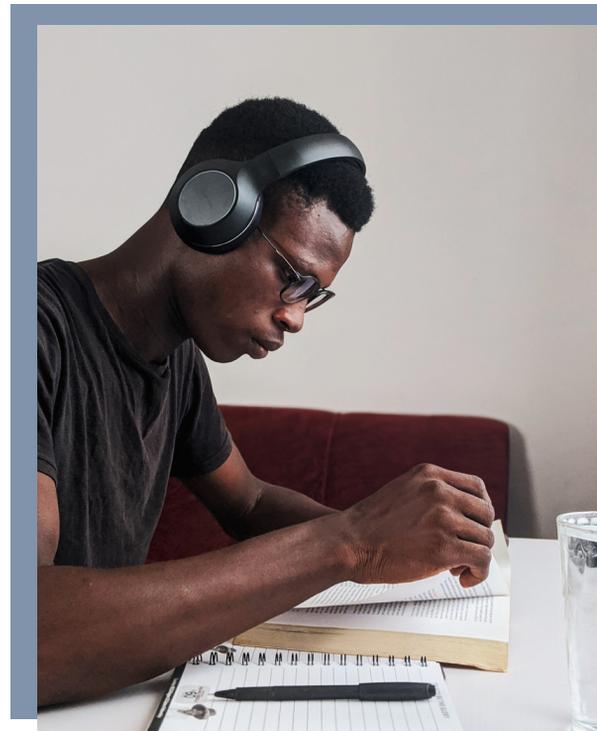
Some infections, including pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorder, or PANDAS, which is associated with Streptococcus, has been linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and some other mental illnesses.

Prenatal injury:

If your son or daughter suffered an injury in utero that affected their brain development, or if they suffered trauma during birth, they might be more likely to develop a mental illness.

Substance abuse:

If your teen or young adult has a lengthy history of abusing drugs or alcohol, they put themselves at greater risk for mental illnesses.



Psychological Factors

Childhood trauma:

Physical or emotional abuse as a child puts your son or daughter at risk for developing a mental illness. Other traumatic life events, such as a tragic accident or the death of a parent, could also negatively impact the brain and how it's wired, making them more likely to experience depression.

Neglect:

Those who have been victims of neglect in their earlier years are more likely to develop mental disorders.



Environmental Factors

Divorce or death:

Significant life changes like parental divorce or the death of someone close to them are major triggers leading to depression and anxiety. If any of these happens in your son or daughter's life, make sure you are diligent about keeping an eye on their mental health. Even if you are unsure about how they are dealing with such big life changes, getting them into a mental health treatment plan is an excellent, proactive way to help your teen or young adult process the situation.

Challenging family life:

Growing up in a turbulent home environment is linked to the development of mental health issues. Stress and possible emotional or physical abuse is a significant risk factor.

Low self-esteem:

The teenage and young adult years can be challenging, especially in the self-esteem department. With the ever-present need for perfection and judgment experienced by social media and pop culture, children and adults alike can have a tough time feeling "adequate".

Changing schools or jobs:

Other significant life changes such as having to move, change school, or change jobs can make your son or daughter feel lonely and stressed. This could lead to the development of mental health issues.

Societal expectations:

Middle school, high school, and even college atmospheres often come with hefty societal expectations. Peer and parental pressure to be popular, thin or a star athlete and get good grades puts much stress on teens and young adults today.

Substance abuse in the home:

Even if your teen or young adult isn't dabbling in drugs or alcohol, if they grow up in a home surrounded by it, they could end up feeling neglected and isolated, leading to mental health disorders.

Types of Therapy for Teens and Young Adults

In the mental health field, there are an incredible number of different approaches used to treat patients. Depending on your son or daughter's particular situation and needs, their treatment plan will likely include one or more of the following treatment protocols, all proven to help teens and young adults overcome mental health disorders.

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT focuses on connecting your child's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings by identifying them and shifting negative thought patterns. CBT therapy will help your teen or young adult learn positive ways to identify negative thought patterns and reconstruct them to be less harmful. Typically, CBT is used to treat depression and anxiety.
- **Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Adolescents (IPT-A):** This type of therapy is typically used to treat depression in several sessions, dependent on individual needs. IPT-A can help your son or daughter decrease their stress in relationships, increase their social functioning skills, and identify the feelings and interpersonal situations that affect their mood. Many times, it's used along with CBT.
- **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT):** If your teen or young adult suffers from depression and exhibits self-destructive behaviors and thoughts, DBT will likely be a part of their treatment plan. As a more rigorous treatment plan, DBT can help your son or daughter learn healthier ways to cope.
- **Exposure Therapy:** This type of therapy can help your teen or young adult face and overcome their fears. Rather than avoiding situations, people, or places that cause them to fear, your child's therapist creates a safe environment to expose them to their fears where they can learn necessary coping skills.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** This therapy modality is typically used to treat patients who have endured a trauma or traumas. EMDR is a form of CBT and will help your son or daughter work through difficult past experiences using left to right eye movement and stimulation. Unlike CBT, however, EMDR focuses on working through each traumatic event separately stored in their brain.
- **Motivational Interviewing (MI):** Motivational interviewing can help your teen or young adult make positive steps toward changing negative behaviors and thought patterns through an interview-like process. This patient-centered approach will help define the changes they'd like to make and allows them to take the steps toward achieving them





Why You Should Consider Therapy for Your Teen or Young Adult

Once you've decided to pursue therapy for your teen or young adult, you must keep in mind that while they are in the process of becoming adults, they also aren't there yet. Unlike your brain, theirs is not yet fully formed. That means the maturity and decision-making processes you have they don't possess as teenagers or young adults.

All this while their bodies undergo everyday changes, and they deal with the external struggles of family, friends, school, and society.

Why *wouldn't* you consider therapy for your teenager or young adult when you consider these everyday stressors? Wouldn't you get them help if they had physical ailments like diabetes, a concussion, or mono?

Of course, you would!

The brain fog and lethargy created by depression require the same serious treatment as physical issues do. Mental health issues aren't something your son or daughter can just "push through." They need help.

Dropping grades and negative social behaviors are challenging to deal with as a parent. And trying to do your best to keep your teen or young adult afloat in school while teaching them healthy coping strategies is hugely draining.

The benefits your son or daughter could gain from an outsider's professional perspective are numerous. Studies show two out of three teens benefit from talk therapy alone. So think about how much a customized therapy program could help them!



The earlier you can recognize the signs of a problem, and take steps to help your child overcome their struggles with mental health the better.

You need to understand, for your son or daughter to grow in their mental health treatment, they have to feel comfortable. And from there, you will start to see progression. Consider the following when your teen or young adult enrolls in therapy:

- **Relationship:** First, your son or daughter must develop a relationship with their therapist. There's no way they will walk into their therapists' office and feel comfortable right away - especially when you aren't there with them. (Although you may be able to be there for the first session or two. Just clarify that with the therapist first so you know what to expect.)
- **Client/Patient Confidentiality:** Like, you, your son or daughter has a right to privacy. Anything they say in their therapy session is subject to the client/patient confidentiality agreement. Of course, if they disclose information about the desire to hurt themselves or others, this violates that agreement.

Don't expect your teen or young adult's therapist to unload everything to you. Instead, before treatment begins, make sure you understand the ground rules and have the therapist explain how often you'll receive updates.

What to Expect While Your Teen or Young Adult Is Going Through Mental Health Treatment

If you've ever been through therapy yourself, you know there is no magic formula to help your son or daughter from the very first session. Therapy takes time. Depending on your child's individual struggles, teaching them healthy coping strategies and working through difficulties could take anywhere from a matter of weeks to possibly even years.

But the good news is, it's worth it.



- **Therapy is *not* about your son or daughter's happiness:** While every therapist would love to see teens and young adults happy, a common misconception about therapy is that happiness is the goal.

That's not necessarily the case. Your teen or young adult's therapist isn't focused on ensuring your son or daughter's happiness. Rather, their focus is on teaching healthy coping strategies and rearranging their negative thoughts and behavior patterns.

- **Your son or daughter will need to think for themselves:** Your teen or young adult's therapist isn't there to tell them what to do. They won't judge your son or daughter's values, and they won't impose their own on them. They'll simply offer their professional advice through pros and cons and help them reach their own conclusions. Understanding this will help your son or daughter take ownership of their mental health and future decisions.

- **Feelings will be validated:** For your teen or young adult child to progress in their mental health journey, their therapist must acknowledge and validate your feelings. However, keep in mind that validating their feelings and agreeing with your son and daughter are two entirely different things.

For example, if your son or daughter feels frustrated with how something typically occurs at home, their therapist may validate their feelings, but that doesn't mean they agree with their perspective.



How to Support Your Son or Daughter During Treatment

It's no secret that many teens and young adults don't like being told what to do, so getting them to agree to therapy may feel like an impossible task. But you must stick to your decision in getting them treatment, especially if they display signs of depression.

When talking with your teen or young adult about getting help, reiterate that going to therapy does *not* mean they are "crazy" or "weak." Unfortunately, there can be a negative stigma associated with mental health, and it could make someone not want to seek help. However, if there is a silver lining to the pandemic, it's that the idea of getting help for mental illness is becoming more socially accepted.

Here are some helpful tips to help your teen or young adult before and during their mental health treatment:

- **Involve them in the decision-making process.** When possible, let your son or daughter have a say in where and how they'd like to receive therapy. Research locations and therapist options together if you can. Let them know you trust them to make their own appointments if you believe they are okay to handle this. If not, you can work on the appointment schedule as a team.
- **Be a part of the solution.** In order for your son or daughter to successfully make the necessary changes, you need to be a part of the process as a parent. You are your child's biggest advocate and a crucial part of their support system, so you need to make yourself available to their therapist when they want to call a family session or speak with you about their progress. Don't expect them to make changes all on their own.



- **Know your place.** Your teen or young adult's confidentiality and privacy are important to them. One thing that helps many teens and young adults agree to therapy is speaking about their struggles, difficulties, and relationship issues with someone other than their caregivers.

Many teens and young adults don't want to "disappoint" or alarm their parents, so speaking with a trusted therapist who won't reveal what they've discussed (unless it's dangerous) is a massive plus for them.

With that in mind, you must respect their privacy and confidentiality. A good therapist will know exactly how to involve you in the therapeutic process without breaking the trust your child has with them. Do your best not to interfere with your child's therapy. Unless your child is in immediate crisis, you don't need to contact their therapist for every concern you have about your child. Instead, work with them to schedule regular meetings to discuss your child's progress.

- **Let your child know you support them.** As stated earlier, you are your child's most important support system. It's crucial you validate your teen or young adult's mental health issues and understand that while struggling, they *do* want to get better.

Without prying for information about their sessions, make sure you let your son or daughter know you can talk about their progress if they want. And do your best to comment on the positive changes they make throughout the therapeutic process, no matter how small they may be.

- **Be a good role model.** Normalizing therapy and mental health support can go a long way in supporting your child during the treatment process. If you've experienced therapy yourself, let them know how it helped you. And don't be afraid to discuss your emotions and struggles with your child. By opening up about some of your feelings and struggles, you help them see it's okay to talk about things with you. It's not fair to ask your child to talk about what they feel if you don't talk about what you feel.
- **Take care of yourself.** You know the often-cited safety instruction: "Put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others." That means you have to make sure you take care of yourself, not just your son or daughter. The stress of raising teens and young adults can take its toll on your mental health too. Make sure you practice regular self-care and maybe even consider enrolling yourself in therapy.



How to Know if Your Child's Mental Health Treatment is Working

Again, therapy takes time. Your child's mental health isn't going to improve in one session - it's a process. As a parent, you may find yourself feeling impatient with how your son or daughter is progressing through therapy. We understand. You just want your child to feel better and thrive in school and relationships.

To gauge how well your child responds to therapy, it's a good idea to set up regular meetings with their therapist. Make sure you get updated regularly on how they think things are going and what you can look for to ensure your son or daughter is making progress.

Some signs therapy is working may be:

- **Not fighting you to go to therapy**
- **Having more positive relationships with family members**
- **Grades improve**
- **Wanting to spend more time with friends**

Finding a Good Therapist for Your Teen or Young Adult

Once you decide on getting help for your son or daughter, you may quickly become overwhelmed with options. Beyond worrying about what insurance therapists take, it's crucial to choose a trusted therapist from the get-go. Otherwise, it might be challenging to get your child to go at all. If your child doesn't bond well with their counselor, therapy isn't going to be effective.

In choosing a therapist for your child, strive to get one that:

- Focuses on helping teens and young adults, specifically
- Will discuss your child's progress regularly
- Doesn't take a one-size-fits-all approach to therapy
- Will work with you to advocate for your child in school

Here at Dayrise Wellness, we believe in providing immediate solutions for lasting results. Our team of teen and young adult therapists tailor your child's individualized treatment plan to ensure they get the tools and support they need to overcome mental health struggles. We partner with you as advocates and are here to support you 24/7 by phone or online.

We're passionate about helping teens, and young adults thrive in school, relationships, and life. If you are looking for help for your son or daughter, give our care coordinators a call. Taking that first step in seeking treatment for your child is one of the most important things you can do. **Don't wait until it's too late to get help. We're ready to help you and your child achieve their full potential.**



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