

How can I support my teenager who has anxiety or depression?

How can a parent best support their teenager while they are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

ACKNOWLEDGE

1. Acknowledge your teenager's feelings. Parents can acknowledge their child's feelings with simple statements such as: "I'm sorry you are feeling stressed." "I can tell you are feeling sad." "I know this is hard for you, I'm here for you no matter what." "I can tell you are feeling anxious, I'm here for you."

LISTEN

2. Listen unconditionally. Resist the urge to fix the problem, criticise, pass judgement, or lecture. The moment our children are born we have an innate desire to be there for them, take away their pain, and fix their problems. When they fall and hurt their knee, we console them and get a plaster. When they bump their head, we console them and get an ice pack. When they have a fever, we put a cool washcloth on their forehead and give them pain relief. With these examples we can tangibly "fix" their problem or ease their pain. With anxiety and/or depression there is no quick fix. We must be patient, listen unconditionally, and support our teens as they learn to cope with their symptoms.

PATIENCE

3. Be patient and understanding. Respect when your teen is not ready to talk or wants time alone. Watch non-verbal and verbal communication. When a teenager has symptoms of anxiety or depression, they sometimes feel like they have no control over their lives. Allow them to have control in some areas of their life and encourage their independence.

ENCOURAGE

4. Encourage and respect positive coping skills such as journaling, deep breathing, exercise, mindfulness activities, listening to music, spending time with a pet, etc. Have an open conversation with your teenager about what coping skills help them feel better and when you see your teen struggling, encourage them to use one of their positive coping skills.

TIME

5. Spend quality one on one time together. Do mutually enjoyable activities. Encourage your teen to "take control" of the planning so they get a chance to decide on the activity, restaurant, game, etc. to do with you. Provide them the opportunity to be the teacher of you. Make quality time a priority...put it on your calendar!

OPPORTUNITIES

6. Allow opportunities for socialisation. Be creative and find ways for your teenager to still have opportunities for socialisation whatever your comfort level is. Encourage not to stay in their rooms as much.

SELF CARE

7. Model self-care and positive coping skills. As a parent, finding time for self-care is sometimes easier said than done; however, it is so important that your teenager sees you modelling self-care. It is ok for us as parents to be vulnerable and to share our thoughts, feelings, and struggles with our teenagers. This shows our teenagers they are not alone and that we can all get through things with self-care, positive coping skills, and support.

ROUTINE

8. Provide structure and rules. Encourage your teen to have a routine even if it is a flexible routine. Continue to be consistent and reinforce rules when your child is struggling with anxiety and/or depression. Have open, honest conversations with your teenager about rules and expectations.

RECOGNISE

9. Learn about and recognise the symptoms of anxiety and depression including self-harm and thoughts of suicide. This will help you understand what your child is experiencing so you can better support them. If your child is having suicidal thoughts, please reassure them you are going to get them the help they need. After a disclosure of suicidal thoughts, you could say "I am so glad you told me about your thoughts, I'm going to get you an appointment to see a therapist. We are going to get through this together."

10. Seek professional support when necessary. You are not alone!

NHS Talking therapies

<https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/talking-therapies/>

Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/how-to-find-therapy-or-counselling/>

Every Mind Matters

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/>

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