

UNDERSTANDING TEEN STRESS AND DEPRESSION

- Today we are going to talk about stress and the ways it can affect teenagers.
- We will begin by hearing some true stories of teens whose lives have been affected by stress, and how they dealt with it.
- We will learn about what depression is, the link between stress and depression, and learn to recognize the warning signs of depression in teens.
- We will talk about how to talk with teens who are stressed or depressed, and how to take steps to help them.

Chris' Story

- This is Chris. Chris is a 17 year old high school senior. He tells the story of his experience with stress and depression in his own words:



Chris' Story



- *Depression can strike anyone at any time. Take me for example. I was a typical teenager at high school. I got on well with people and I was an honor student.*



Chris' Story

- *Then, as fate would have it, I lost a dear friend of mine in a car accident. At that moment, my life went into a rapid downward spiral, but I forced myself to carry on. I refused to admit I had a problem or seek help. At the beginning, I bought into the idea that I was supposed to be a perfect student.*



Chris' Story



- *As the time went by, my relationship with my then girlfriend became shaky, my grades began to fall and day to day life became a burden. Soon enough, I learnt that my then girlfriend had cheated on me with my then best friend.*

Chris' Story

- *I began to spend more and more time alone. I no longer enjoyed playing sports, watching movies, or going out with friends. I couldn't focus on schoolwork, I had trouble sleeping, and I was skipping meals and eating only potato chips and soda.*



Chris' Story



- *At one point, things were so bad that I felt like I didn't want to be alive anymore. I wished I could just disappear, or go to bed and never wake up.*

Chris' Story

- *Then one day, two of my friends showed up at my house after school and asked to talk with me. They said “You are not yourself lately. We are worried about you.” After we talked for a while, they convinced me to meet with the school social worker.*



Chris' Story



- *I began to think, my life is nowhere near as bad in comparison to some people. This little insight changed my view on my own situation. I made an appointment with the school Social Worker who referred me to a local doctor who diagnosed me with Depression. From there on I had a few appointments with the doctor and I continued to speak with the school Social Worker on a twice a week basis. We used Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and I began to conquer my dark feelings.*

Chris' Story

- I knew there were people around school who felt similar to me or who were heading down the same dark road, so I decided I needed to address this issue. I arranged with my Principal to allow me to make a formal presentation to the whole school. I stood up in front of the whole school and told them my story.*



Chris' Story



- *It was the hardest thing I ever had to do. But looking back, I realize it was the best thing I could do. The next day I was told that my speech and inspired one person to seek help. It may have been only one person who received my message, but that is one person I know I have helped.*

Chris' Story

- *My message is simple; there is always hope. I want people to know that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, Depression can strike anyone. Nobody is perfect. I urge anyone who feels even slightly like they may have depression to seek help. Remember, you are not alone!*



Chris' Story



- Chris had some very big sources of stress in his life. He experienced the death of a close friend, as well as big relationship problems with his girlfriend.
- But sometimes teens can feel great stress from problems that are less obvious. Now let's here about a teenager named Merri.

Merri's Story

- This is Merri. Merri is a teenage girl and a high school honor student. Here is her story in her own words:



Merri's Story



- *I remember being told that High School was supposed to be the happiest years of my life but it was one of the darkest times in my life.*



Merri's Story

- On the outside, I was named Athlete of the Year and Student of the Year a couple of times but I sure didn't feel like it inside.*



Merri's Story



- *I didn't go out much on weekends because I was terrified of people. During the day I was the outgoing track star and the one whom other students came to for help. But, I remember on Friday nights being just terrified if someone would ask me to go out with them to a party or something.*

Merri's Story

- *I look back at my high school years and wish I could have enjoyed myself more. At the time high school couldn't have gone by fast enough. To pass the time, I got involved in everything I could. Other days, I just wanted to sleep the entire day.*



Merri's Story



- *Some days I remember my mom asking me what was wrong. It took everything in me to fight back the tears and put on a strong image that I was okay. For some reason, I didn't feel comfortable sharing about my fears and anxieties.*

Merri's Story

- *I remember thinking seriously about suicide. I'm sure that would have been a shock to everyone if I had actually done it. On the outside I was outgoing and knew just about everyone's name in the school, but inside I was dying!*



Merri's Story



- *I was in health class one day, and the teacher started talking about teenage depression. She read off a list of possible symptoms – sadness, irritability, having no hope for the future, feeling worthless, feeling guilty for no reason, being tired all the time, losing interest in things you once enjoyed, spending too much time alone, and thinking a lot about death or suicide.*

Merri's Story

- *She explained that depression is a fairly common illness that can be treated. She said that anyone who thinks they might have depression should see a doctor or a counselor.*



Merri's Story



- *A few days later my mom and I were having an argument; over what I can't remember. I saw how I hurt my mom and told her I think I needed to go to the doctor. I told her what the health teacher had said about teenage depression.*

Merri's Story

- *My mom picked up the phone immediately and made a doctor's appointment. She shared with me how my aunt suffered from depression too. I couldn't believe it. My aunt was the most hilarious person I've ever met. My mom saw a connection.*



Merri's Story



- *I went to the doctor and she asked me a series of questions which I all answered 'yes' to. It was clear I had depression. She put me on a treatment immediately. I couldn't believe the improvement it made.*

Merri's Story

- *All this to say, if you're a teen and you suffer from any of these symptoms, you're not alone!*



Merri's Story

- Merri had to deal with all the usual sources of stress that all teenagers have to deal with: schoolwork, homework, sports practice, arguing with parents, and peer pressure.
- But her stress built up over time, and it put her at risk for depression.



What is depression?

- Depression is a real illness that is both common and serious.



What is depression?

- It is not something a person can “just snap out of.”



What is depression?



- And it is certainly **not** something that people bring onto themselves.

What is depression?

- Like any other illness, depression requires professional treatment.



What is depression?

- And, most importantly, people with depression can go on to live happy, healthy, and productive lives.



Helping a teen with depression



- What can you do if you have a teenage child with the kinds of problems that Chris and Merri had? How can you talk to your child about these problems? Where can you find help for your child?

Signs of Depression

- Let's start by learning what the signs of depression and what symptoms to look for.



Symptoms of Depression

- To be diagnosed with depression, you must have **at least 5** of these 9 symptoms most of the time for **at least two weeks**. However, it is possible to have occasional moments of enjoyment even with depression. (Note: It is common to experience a few of these symptoms once in a while. It does not mean you have depression):

1.) Sad or irritable mood

- Feeling down, irritated, or angry. Irritability is common in teens with depression. Mood changes may look like excessive crying, shutting down, or being combative.



2.) Loss of interest or pleasure in activities



- Feeling no pleasure in things that used to make the person happy. This may mean not returning calls or spending time with friends, or missing school or practice.

3.) Change in weight or appetite

- Eating too much or too little.
Noticeable weight gain or weight loss.



4.) Change in sleep



- Sleeping too much or too little, or sleeping at the wrong times. It may look like having trouble staying awake during the day or staying up all night.

5.) Feeling sped up or slowed down

- Feeling or looking like you can't sit still – or, that you are in slow motion.



6.) Fatigue or loss of energy



- Feeling or looking tired during normal activities, like school or sports.

7.) Feelings of worthlessness or guilt

- Feeling incapable of doing most things. Blaming oneself for things that are not one's fault. Thinking or saying things like “I am such a loser” or “No-one likes me.”



8.) Trouble concentrating or making decisions



- This may look like daydreaming in class, or having difficulty making simple decisions like what clothes to wear or what to have for lunch.

9. Thoughts of death or acts of self-harm

- This may include talking a lot about death; being fascinated with music, art, or writing about death; talking about not wanting to be around anymore; or intentionally cutting or hurting oneself.



Talking to a teen who may be depressed



- There are three basic steps to talking to a teen who may be struggling with depression:

Talking to a teen who may be depressed

- Step 1:

NOTICE

“I’ve noticed changes in you.”

Sit down with your teen and gently describe the changes you’ve seen that you are concerned about.



Talking to a teen who may be depressed



- Example: *“Hey, can we talk. I’ve noticed lately you’ve been spending a lot of time by yourself, not meeting your friends, and staying alone in your room a lot. You’ve missed volleyball practice and been late to school. You seem down. This isn’t like you. What’s going on?”*

Talking to a teen who may be depressed

- Step 2:

CARE

“I care for you.”

Let your teen know that he/she is important to you, and you want what is best for him/her.



Talking to a teen who may be depressed



- Example: *“I’m worried about you, and I care. This could be something serious like depression. You deserve to feel better.”*

Talking to a teen who may be depressed

- Step 3:

HELP

“How can I help you? Let’s come up with a plan together.”

Offer your support. Help your teen develop an action plan that the two of you will carry out together.



Talking to a teen who may be depressed



Examples:

- *“You might be overworked. Let’s talk about ways to lighten your schedule.”*
- *“You might need to make some lifestyle changes. Let’s talk about ways that you can eat better, get more sleep, or exercise more.”*
- *“You might feel better if you see your friends more. Let’s talk about ways to help you be more social.”*
- *“You might need some extra help and support at school. Let’s talk to your guidance counselor.”*

Important Reminder

If your teen's depression continues to get worse even after you try to help, he/she should be seen by a medical doctor.

If your teen has serious thoughts about death or about hurting him/herself, contact a doctor immediately and make sure that your teen is constantly supervised.



Question and Answer