

**ADOLESCENT ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION**

Stress, anxiety and depression are a normal part of the human condition, and an optimal level of stress can improve cognitive, physical and emotional performance. It can help us learn to adapt and grow. However, it can be tricky to discern between appropriate stress causing normal mood fluctuations in our children and when they might need help to cope with all they’re going through. Unlike an occasional case of the blues or situational depression, clinical depression is a serious medical condition that needs diagnosis and treatment, which can range from therapy to medication. One in five adolescents suffer each year from depression, yet only 25% of those who suffer get professional help.

**What Does Depression Look Like?**

Symptoms that last most of the day, every day, and are too intense to manage on one’s own are signs of clinical depression. Be aware of:

* Change in mood for more than two weeks – depression can also manifest as sadness, anxiety, anger, irritability, agitation, fatigue
* Difficulty concentrating or thinking
* Withdrawal and isolation from friends and family
* Decreased interest in normally pleasurable activities
* Change in eating and sleeping habits
* Unexplained aches and pains like headaches, stomach aches, heart pounding
* Acting out -- picking fights, getting into trouble, substance use
* Negative thoughts -- talking about worthlessness, inappropriate guilt, death, suicide

**Strategies for Coping with Stress and Anxiety**

Everyone needs to feel competent and proud of something. Whether it is a sport, a skill, a job or a hobby, we all need an arena in which we can feel a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Helping your adolescent discover and pursue those interests can go a long way toward counterbalancing daily stress and anxiety. Additional coping strategies include:

* Exercise – even walking fast for 35 minutes a day directly impacts brain chemistry to improve mood
* Meditation – breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, imagery/visualization
* Mindfulness/centering practice – “be here now”
* Journaling, creative expression, “play”
* Healthy lifestyle -- diet, sleep, time management
* Problem-solving skills – identify common triggers of stress and develop ways to avoid/address
* Challenge negativity – avoid “thought traps” like *never, always, should have, why bother*
* Music -- listen to relax or dance to re-energize

**Beginning the Conversation**

Roughly 75% of adolescents with depression go undiagnosed and untreated, partly because of the stigma associated with mental illness or the perception that depression is a sign of weakness that one should just “get over.” If you suspect your adolescent may be struggling:

* Approach your teen gently, respectfully and non-judgmentally
* Cite specific examples of your concerns and observations
* Listen and acknowledge your teen’s feelings
* Reinforce your adolescent’s strengths and good qualities
* Reassure that you are there to love and support
* Suggest possible options for treatment

**Local Resources**

* Pediatrician
* School Guidance Counselors/Deans
* Brookline Mental Health Center <http://www.brooklinecenter.org/>
* Children’s Hospital Boston <http://www.childrenshospital.org/>
* B-PEN webpage “Teens and Mental Health” <http://www.b-pen.org/mental-health-stress-anxiety-depression.html>

**Online Information**

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

[www.experiencejournal.com/depression](http://www.experiencejournal.com/depression) [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

[www.talklisten.org](http://www.talklisten.org) [www.yourlifeyourvoice.org](http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org)

[www.familyaware.org](http://www.familyaware.org) [www.hopeline.com](http://www.hopeline.com)

[www.thebalancedmind.org](http://www.thebalancedmind.org)

**Recommended Reading**

**Non-Fiction**

* *Monochrome Days: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience with Depression* – Cait Irwin
* *Eight Stories: An Adolescent Chooses Hope Over Suicide* – De Quincy Lezine and David Brent
* *If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder* – Dwight Evans and Linda Andrews
* *If Your Adolescent Has an Anxiety Disorder* – Edna Foa and Linda Andrews
* *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* – John Ratey
* *My Kind of Sad: What It’s Like to Be Young and Depressed* – Kate Scowen

**Fiction Appropriate for Teens**

* *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* – Paolo Giordano
* *13 Reasons Why* – Jay Asher
* *Catcher in the Rye* – J.D. Salinger

For more BHS Library recommendations, go to <http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/reading_list_cohen.docx>

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