



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING TEEN DEPRESSION

As a parent, it can be tough to know what to do when your teen is struggling with depression. It's not about trying to "fix" things or offering solutions — **it's about being there, listening, and creating a safe space for them.** Here are some key things to keep in mind:

TEEN DEPRESSION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Teen depression might not always look like adult depression.

Parents should watch out for:

- Persistent irritability or anger rather than sadness or gloom
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Drop in school performance or difficulty keeping up with schoolwork



Tips for Parenting Your Teen with Depression



LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Your teen needs to feel heard, not lectured. Try not to jump straight into problem-solving or giving quick fixes. They're not looking for your answers—they just want you to listen and understand. **Avoid comparing their experience to yours, even if you're trying to show you get it.** That can backfire and make them feel even more misunderstood. Depression can make everything feel like too much, and comparisons can add to that weight.

What to say:

- "That sounds really tough."
- "I hear you, and I get why you feel that way."

SMALL ACTS MATTER

Even if your teen seems distant, they still need to know you care. A quick note saying you love them, or a simple check-in to see how they're doing can mean a lot. Buy their favorite snack and leave it on the counter without making a big deal about it. Offer to watch their favorite movie or go grab ice cream with them—no pressure. Ask them to send you any TikToks they think are funny. **These small gestures show you're there, even if they're not ready to talk.**

Teens value these little acts of care more than parents often realize. It's not about fixing things right away but reminding them they're not alone.

Tip: Keep it chill and open-ended. A note saying, "I'm here if you need to talk," is a good place to start.



INVITE CONVERSATIONS, DON'T FORCE THEM

You don't need to push your teen to talk. **Instead, just let them know the door's always open.** Telling them, "I'm here when you're ready," can be enough to make them feel safe.

Giving your teen the freedom to start conversations when they're ready builds trust. When they know they can come to you without any pressure, they're more likely to reach out when they really need it.

What to say:

- "Whenever you feel like talking, I'm here."
- "I'm not going anywhere. If you need anything, just let me know."





BE DIRECT ABOUT SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

It's important not to avoid tough topics like suicide. Asking directly, "Do you have thoughts of wanting to be dead or hurting yourself?" or "Do you want to die?" might feel uncomfortable, but it's crucial. If they say yes, stay calm. Not all thoughts of self-harm mean an immediate crisis, but they always need to be taken seriously.

If they say yes: Work together on a safety plan to help them feel supported. Stay calm and just listen. Ask how you can help them feel safe. Lock up any accessible medications, firearms, cleaning chemicals, and car keys.

Don't take privileges away or make them feel punished for being honest about their feelings—this is so important.

If they say they have a plan, intent, access to lethal means, or you cannot keep them safe, treat it as urgent. Call 911 in the Philippines, go to the nearest emergency room, or contact a local crisis service. If they do not have a plan or immediate intent, still arrange prompt support from a mental health professional and continue monitoring safety.

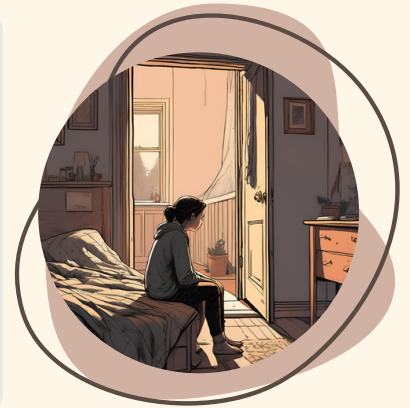
ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Motivation can be really tough for a teen dealing with depression. **Reluctance to do tasks doesn't mean they're lazy or defiant.** Offer to help with tasks, and be flexible about chores and responsibilities. Understand that they might not be able to do things at their usual pace right now. **When you understand their limits, it helps them avoid feeling guilty or like they're not good enough.**

Reminder: Depression isn't your fault, and it's not something that can be "fixed" overnight. It's a process, and just being there for your teen — even if it feels like nothing's changing — is what really matters.

What to say:

- "I know it's hard to keep up with things right now. How can I help?"
- "It's okay if you're not feeling up to it. We'll get through this together."



AVOID TOXIC POSITIVITY

Telling your teen to "look on the bright side" or "just think positive" can feel dismissive. **What they really need is empathy, not a push to change their mindset.** Depression is exhausting and isolating, so let them know you see their pain.

Empathy, not forced positivity, helps teens feel understood. Acknowledging their pain gives them space to process their emotions instead of pushing them to hide them.

Avoid saying things like "just pray about it" or "faith will fix it." That might help some people, but not everyone feels the same way. Let your teen bring up how faith impacts their depression if they want to, and try not to get defensive. If they don't bring it up, it's best to leave it alone.

What to say:

- "This must be really tough for you."
- "You seem like you're feeling really alone and tired."



PARENTS, PLEASE TAKE NOTE:

Parenting a teen with depression is challenging, but your role isn't to be their therapist — it's to be their support system. Be patient, stay open, and remember that just being there can mean more than you realize.

And honestly, there is nothing worse than seeing your baby hurt — no matter how old they are. It's not your fault. Remind yourself of that and make sure you also have a therapist to talk about how this impacts you. Because it does impact you, too.

If you are in the Philippines and need help now: call 911 for immediate danger, or contact the National Center for Mental Health Crisis Hotline at 1553 for 24/7 mental health crisis support.