



# Teen Depression: What Teens and Parents Need to Know

**D**oes life seem a lot harder lately? Have you been feeling empty, very sad, or hopeless? If so, you may be depressed.

Depression is a medical condition that needs to be treated. It's not a sign of weakness or "all in your head," and it's not your fault.

## What causes depression?

Depression can have several causes. These can include:

- Having a family history of depression.
- Feeling a lot of pressure or stress in your life.
- Losing a parent or other person you're close to.
- Breaking off a close relationship.
- Being injured or having a chronic illness.
- Suffering from abuse or neglect.
- Having family problems such as constant arguing or domestic violence.
- Being bullied.
- Worrying about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

## How do I know if I'm depressed?

Feeling upset or down occasionally is normal, but depression is different.

Ask yourself these questions. Have you:

- Lost interest in sports or other things you usually enjoy?
- Felt more jumpy, restless, or angry?
- Had trouble getting along with your family or friends?
- Felt really bad about yourself or been self-critical?
- Thought a lot about death and dying?

Also, have you had changes in your:

- Appetite (gained or lost weight)?
- Energy level (feeling tired, restless, or irritable)?
- Sleep patterns (sleeping a lot more or less)?

If you answered "yes" to 5 or more questions and you've been feeling like this nearly every day for 2 weeks or more, you could be depressed.

Please contact your doctor or the Mental Health Department at your facility right away. They're here to help you.

## What can I do if I'm depressed?

With treatment, 80 percent of people get better. Most start to feel better in just a few weeks.

Treatment for depression usually includes counseling, medications, or both. Depression usually doesn't get better on its own. Getting treatment is nothing to be ashamed of.

You can also try these self-care methods:

- Talk about how you feel with a caring adult you trust, such as a parent, favorite relative or teacher, or someone at your place of worship.
- Spend time with family and friends you care about, even though you may feel like being alone.
- Get some exercise, even if you don't feel like it. It can be as simple as taking a walk.
- Make sure to sleep 8 or more hours a night and eat 3 meals a day.
- Express how you feel to a friend or by writing (or drawing) in a journal.
- Plan at least one enjoyable thing a day. Notice how you feel. Also remember how you felt when you were happier.

## Alcohol and drugs

Some depressed teens use alcohol or drugs. They may have started drinking or using drugs to try to feel better. For others, drinking or drug use comes first, and causes depression or makes it worse.

No matter how it starts, drinking and using drugs while you're depressed can be dangerous. Tell someone you trust about it and get help as soon as you can.

## What can parents do?

As a parent, we recommend that you:

- Talk with your teen and let them know you care and want to help. Ongoing moodiness is more than “just a phase.” If their behavior seems disruptive, it's likely a cry for help.
  - Have your teen evaluated for depression. You can get information from a school counselor or at your local Kaiser Permanente Mental Health Services Department or Health Education Center.
  - Lock away medications that may be deadly or don't keep them at home (dispose of them safely).
- Do the same for prescription painkillers, antianxiety medications, and any other pills that can be misused.
- Remove guns from the home, including hunting rifles.
  - Talk with your teen about the dangers of alcohol and drugs. Explain that they make depression worse.
  - Watch for warning signs and symptoms of your teen's depression symptoms and behaviors. Note down when and how often symptoms occur. Share your notes with your teen's doctor or therapist.
  - Talk with your teen's therapist about your questions and concerns about treatment.

## We're here to help

Contact us at Mental Health Services at [kpdoc.org/mentalhealth](https://kpdoc.org/mentalhealth) to learn more or schedule an appointment.



You can also download mobile self-care apps at [kp.org/selfcareapps](https://kp.org/selfcareapps).

## Community resources

- 24-hour California Youth Crisis Hotline: call or text 1-800-843-5200
- The Trevor Project 24/7 Crisis Support: text “Start” to 678-678
- Alcohol and Drugs Helpline: call (844) 289-0879
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: [findyourwords.org](https://findyourwords.org)

If you're hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner, or being pressured to have sex, it can seriously affect your health. Call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to [loveisrespect.org](https://loveisrespect.org).