



Youth Tips for Parents: How to Talk to Your Teenager About His or Her Mental Health

For many parents, talking to their teenager is difficult. The level of difficulty often increases when your teenager has a mental health or behavior challenge. The following suggestions are written by teens who are in a support group for mental health.

Tips for Engaging Your Child

- **Ask me if it is a good time to talk.** I am unique: I may want to talk with you immediately when something is on my mind, or I may only share when there aren't any other distractions and it's just you and me.
- **Listen** to what I say without speaking or interrupting.
- **Show you are interested** by looking me in the eye with real empathy. If I avoid eye contact, know it is just hard for me sometimes.
- Sometimes I would rather write you a letter than talk. **Allow me to choose my way to communicate.**
- **Be patient with me.** Sometimes I just can't follow or find the words; be ready to repeat your questions or statements if I ask you to do so.
- **Be calm.** I may be feeling emotions I can't control; being calm will help me and yelling will not.
- **Allow me to approach you** when I feel you are ready to listen to me.
- I may not always be comfortable talking with you. If appropriate, **allow me to talk to another trusted adult** to get help.
- When I am struggling in school, **ask me about it in an understanding and calm way.** I am most likely already feeling bad about it.
- Make sure you **praise me** when appropriate. Otherwise I may think the only time you want to talk is when I have done something you don't like.
- **Give me time.** Let me know I am important to you and I will talk to you when I am ready.
- Recognize that I have **my own skills, talents, and ideas.**
- **Speak with me in a gentle manner.** When you yell or swear it hurts me, and I may act out or not talk to you.
- **Realize** that you don't always need to have the last word.

(Resources for parents on reverse side.)

Resources for Parents

health.state.mn.us/youth/providers/resourcesparents.html

This Minnesota Department of Health site provides parents with resources and information on specific topic areas involving teens and mental health, alcohol, and drugs.

helpguide.org/home-pages/teen-issues.htm

This is a mental health resource website for teens dealing with depression and suicide. It provides information on signs and symptoms, how to cope with suicidal thoughts, tips for staying healthy and places to get help.

PACER.org

PACER provides individual support, advocacy, and education for children and youth with mental health and emotional or behavioral disorders through its website, PACER.org/cmh.

In addition, PACER staff facilitate a Youth Advisory Board focused on advocacy for youth with mental health and behavioral challenges. For more information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000.