

# Parent Guide to Teen Depression

## Teen Suicide: What You Need to Know

Depression is a medical illness caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. This imbalance changes a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

**WARNING SIGNS:** Big changes in eating, sleeping, and mood that last longer than 2 weeks. Flashes of anger, withdrawing physically and emotionally, not taking care of themselves. Giving away possessions, talking about suicide or mentioning they don't want to be a burden any longer.

**The best way to keep a teen from killing themselves is to ask:**

**“Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?”**

**If they are suicidal,**

- Seek Immediate Professional Help. Call 911 if necessary.
- Emergency rooms can assess and will determine if your child is at risk and what actions need to be taken.
- Remind them of your love.
- Reassure them you can work on the issues together.

US National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **1-800-273-TALK.**

**1-800-SUICIDE**

Outside the US: **Suicide.org**

**You do not need to be in crisis to access these resources. You can also call these numbers to talk and get information.**

## Communicating with Your Teen

**Do love them unconditionally**

**Don't ask too many questions**

**Do listen to them**

**Don't lecture**

**Do use positive reinforcement**

**Don't discipline with shame as it leads to feelings of worthlessness**

**Do text or write your child positive messages daily.**

**Don't ever give up on your teen, even if they shut you out**

**Be involved in every aspect of treatment.**

**Don't criticize just because you don't understand.**

**Some helpful resources to try:**

**The Feeling Good Handbook**

*by David Burns*

Shares information on everything from medication to treatment.

**Jared's Journal Kit**

*by Sherry Krueger and Kristi Barth*

The journey of Jared and his parents as he attempts suicide and finds a road to recovery.

**Battling the Blues: The Handbook for Helping Children and Teens with Depression**

*by Kim "Tip" Frank*

Helpful tools that children and teens can readily employ.

**Eli the Bipolar Bear**

*by Sharon Bracken*

A book for younger kids about mood swings and how to live with them.

**Finding Rainbows through My Sister's Depression**

*by Sherry Krueger and Kristi Barth*

Written to help children understand depression.

## Helpful Lifestyle Changes

**Exercise:** This is a natural way for your teen to boost serotonin and endorphins.

**Sleep:** Sleep helps with mood. Your teen needs 9-10 hours/night.

**Nutrition:** Add Omega-3 foods to their diet...fish, walnuts, spinach, flax seeds...

**Safely Store Harmful Items:**

Keep suicidal teens away from pills, alcohol, knives and other harmful items.

**Encourage Social Interactions:**

Prod your child to get with healthy peers for positive interaction. This may mean you drive them to the mall, invite kids over, or go to the movies.

**Have a Schedule:** Set a routine for waking up, going to bed, doing homework, taking meds.

**Come up with a strategy for your teen to communicate with you nonverbally** that lets you know how their day was, how they are feeling, and if they are in crisis.

Whiteboard where they rate their day on a scale of one to ten.

Wearing a specific bracelet if they are feeling stressed or in crisis.

**Find Ways to Take Care of Yourself and the Rest of Your Family:**

Get help through friends, support groups, family, church, or the medical community.

Schedule one-on-one time with your spouse and other children.

Create some "normal" family time. Find times to laugh and do something fun together.

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## Getting Help from the School

Speak to the school counselor and let them know your child's struggles.

Check to see if your child can qualify for an IEP or 504 plan.

Find one trusted teacher or liaison to help you advocate and coordinate your child's care.

You may want to sign a release of information form so this advocate can be kept informed of your child's needs.

Remember, this is a private matter and is best kept to a small group of people. This will help protect your child's well-being.

Create a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) or a Safety Plan for your teen.

## How to Find Low-Cost Mental Health Care

Try your child's school psychologist or counselor for any programs they may provide.

Check with the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics.

Many employers have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that provide free short-term counseling.

Some therapists provide a sliding fee scale, which means they charge based on how much you can afford to pay.

Check with your insurance to see how they can help you.

Check with your primary care doctor for help and referrals.

## Mental Health Resources Hotlines, Websites, & Books

National Alliance on Mental Health [nami.org](http://nami.org)

National Institute of Mental Health [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

To Write Love on Her Arms [twloha.com](http://twloha.com)

SIOS: Self-Injury & Support [sioutreach.org](http://sioutreach.org)

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ Youth) [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org)

The Jed Foundation [jedfoundation.org](http://jedfoundation.org)

### Bully and Crisis Hotlines

[121help.me](http://121help.me) text **HELP** to **20121**  
[cyberbullyhotline.com](http://cyberbullyhotline.com)

### For highly-trained staff:

**1-800-273-TALK**

**1-800-SUICIDE**

**1-800-TLC-TEEN** 6-10 pm PST

**1-800-448-3000** Boys Town Hotline

### Crisis Text Line

Text **741741** to reach a trained counselor

### Teen and Youth Help Line

Text "teen" to **839863**  
4-10 pm PST

