



Children, Teens, and Mental Health

Depression and Anxiety in Teens:

Many of us have children and teenagers in our homes or in our lives. As life becomes more complicated and competitive, the incidence of depression and anxiety in children and teens is on the rise. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in young people between the ages of 10 and 24, according to the Center for Disease Control.

COVID is impacting the mental health of children and teens and magnifying symptoms of depression and anxiety due to disrupted routines, separation from friends, worry about the virus, and worry about at-risk family members.

How to help children and teens during the pandemic:

- Plan safe ways for children to engage socially: a bike ride, a bonfire, or a picnic where everyone brings their own food
- Help them understand. Talk to children about the spread of the virus in age-appropriate ways that encourage caution but do not cause anxiety or panic
- Ask them for ways they can feel connected that have a low risk
- Limit screen time and social media
- Stick to a schedule
- Ensure they get enough sleep and are eating healthy

With social distancing and families spending more time at home, everyone spends more time in front of the TV or another screen. Excessive screen time can stress children and teens. Work together to come up with a plan that includes both online and offline time. Make sure phones and tablets are put away an hour before bedtime to ensure they get enough sleep.

Recognizing the signs of depression and anxiety in children and teens can mean getting them the help and support they need early. Look out for the following:

- Emotional changes, such as feelings of hopelessness or emptiness
- Trouble thinking or concentrating
- Changes in eating habits or weight
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Sudden withdrawal from friends or activities (even if only virtual)

If your child or teen makes any mention of suicide, take those words seriously and act immediately. If your child or teen is hesitant to talk to a professional, try framing it as strength building or coaching rather than fixing something that is broken.

Professional athletes seek out coaches to build skills. A professional therapist can help build skills needed in times of stress or crisis.