

Why is it important to pay attention to how a child behaves emotionally?

Almost half of the teens in the Boston Public School System responding to a recent survey* reported experiencing four or more stressful conditions in the past 6 months. These include: stress with homework, grades, after school jobs and conflicts within the family such as death, illness, injury or separation from a family member.

- * Emotional health troubles, and the way they make teens behave, are a leading cause of why teens drop out of school
- * One out of every ten children suffer from some form of mental health problem
- * Most people who grew up to have serious emotional problems as adults showed signs when they were young children or teenagers
- * Suicide, a behavior often caused by emotional health problems, is the third leading cause of deaths in teens

* The Boston 2003 Trend Report: Snapshot of Boston's Children and Youth

Produced by
**The Boston Coalition
for Child and Adolescent
Mental Health**

Understanding how teens behave emotionally.

ages 13 -15



Boston Public Health Commission
1010 Massachusetts Ave
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**With support from
Children's Hospital Boston**



Children's Hospital Boston



*What to expect.
When to be concerned.*

“Mood Changes” are normal in teenagers

Any teen can experience emotional 'ups and downs' that can cause them to act differently from the way they do usually. This is just a normal part of growing up. Teenagers can become moody, overly-sensitive people who at times argue, break rules and experiment in new, sometimes unsafe, ways.

All teens respond to stress differently; some become angry, while others become withdrawn. Typical teen behavior can be stressful for teens and the adults around them. There are services listed in this brochure such as support groups, parent education classes and even other parents you can talk with to help you reduce your stress.

However, when an emotional change is very extreme, or when the way a teen acts begins upsetting life at home or school—then it may be a sign there is a bigger emotional problem.

Do you know what to watch for and when to be concerned?

A special note to parents:

You know your child better than anyone and you are the best one to decide what is "ok" for your child. Use the suggestions enclosed to educate yourself, then ask questions.

Emotional health problems are as common as physical problems. To raise a healthy child you need to take care of both. There is no reason for either you or your teen to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about an emotional health problem.

There are various types of mental health care services offering different ways to treat your teen. There are many types of individual and group counseling, and support groups that may help with an emotional problem.

Medication may be helpful, but it is not the only way to help your teen. Remember, it is your decision.

Family outings, after school activities and community volunteering are some of the ways you can help your teen.

You have a right to work with someone who is aware of, and respects, your culture.

If you are not getting the support you feel your teen needs, don't give up! Keep trying. With so many resources available, the important thing is to keep searching until you find something that works.

Remember, you are your child's best and most important supporter!

A special note to those who care about teens:

Remember, you don't have to be a parent to get help for a child. If you suspect a child has a problem, you can talk to the parent, the child's teacher, or another adult who knows about teens to see if they have similar concerns. Often schools offer services that address emotional health. Ask questions and if needed, get help. There are many resources out there (some included in this brochure) that can help you help a child in emotional need.

About the chart inside:

If you are a parent, or someone who cares about teens, here are some helpful suggestions on what to look for and what to do if you think there is a problem with the emotional health of a teen. When it comes to the "right" behavior for the teen's age **keep in mind that these are guidelines for ages 13-15 and every teen is different.**

This brochure is not meant to take the place of professional advice. It is meant to give you a way to talk to someone you know and trust- such as a friend, teacher, counselor, doctor or spiritual advisor- if you have concerns about a teen's emotional health.

Ask questions if a teen experiences one or more of the signs of concern listed on the chart inside. When reviewing the behaviors in the chart, keep in mind the:

Frequency - How often does the conduct happen?
Intensity - How extreme is the conduct?
Duration - How long has it been going on?

Behavior for Teens Ages 13-15

What you can do

Typical :

Desires privacy.
 Wants to be around friends instead of family.
 Thinks about self, how he/she looks.
 Feels peer pressure.
 May lose confidence in self.
 Worries about being in the "right" group.
 Questions authority, argues, is rude, and feels that "no one understands."
 Needs more sleep.
 May have poor bathing or grooming habits.
 May have trouble being on time.
 Fights with/ has problems with boyfriend/girlfriend/family.
 Fights about not having enough spending money.
 May question their identity, race, culture or gender.

Here are some suggestions to support teenagers:

Give them privacy, but stay informed and get to know their friends and where they hang out.
 Continue to involve a teen in family, community and spiritual activities even if they have an "attitude."
 Establish clear rules about appropriate ways to act and the consequences of disobeying. Then stick to them.
 Set limits but remain open to negotiation.
 Spend "quality time" alone with a teen.
 Encourage independent thinking to fight against peer pressure.
 Ask for their opinion.
 Build self confidence by giving positive feedback often.
 Tell them what they are doing well.
 Encourage them to take a leadership role – then support the causes they believe in.
 Encourage them to take part in activities such as sports or other after school programs.
 Talk about their future goals without lecturing.

Be Concerned :

Suddenly becomes a "loner," isolating himself/herself from family and friends.
 Has frequent sadness, crying, or "temper tantrums."
 Starts feeling hopeless about future, listens to only sad music, writes only sad poetry, etc.
 Sleeps/daydreams so much that it gets in the way of regular life.
 Looks "normal" but thinks/talks about being fat and gaining/losing weight.
 Has a sudden weight gain or loss.
 Changes how they behave in school. Avoids going to or suddenly drops out of school.
 Feels everyone is talking about him or her in a "bad" way.
 Needs to repeat the same actions over and over. (Wash hands, clean objects, repeats tasks).
 Has so much energy he/she sleeps very little without being tired.
 Has such a high opinion of himself/herself that it becomes an unrealistic fantasy.
 Is always switching between acting super happy or silly, and very angry or withdrawn.
 Starts smoking or abusing alcohol, sex and or drugs.
 Shoplifts, destroys property in school or community.
 Hurts animals.

Consider the Frequency, Intensity and Duration of the behaviors and then:

Talk to your teen and really listen*. See "How to talk to a teen" below.
 Make yourself available so your teen can approach you.
 Call a mental health hotline for support and resources.
 Find and call a mental health professional.
 If you are a parent or guardian, contact your teen's primary care physician.
 Reach out to a teacher, school guidance counselor, social worker or parent.
 Talk to a spiritual advisor.
 Check with the teen's school and see if they offer any mental health services.
 Continue to follow the suggestions listed under "What you can do" in the section above.

Must act :

Talks of death and or suicide.
 Gives away personal belongings that mean a lot to them.
 Acts violently toward others or property.
 Acts in a harmful way to self and others.
 Cuts or burns himself/herself.
 Starts hearing voices.

Seek immediate medical attention:

All these behaviors require immediate psychiatric evaluation and emergency care.
 Call 911 and tell them you have a medical emergency or a life-threatening situation.

*How to talk to a teen:

Set aside a regular time to listen to him or her. Share, don't lecture.

Ask "open-ended" questions. (What did you do in school today?) instead of questions where they can answer "yes" or "no" (Did you have a good day in school?).

Offer to listen to troubles without judging.

Admit that you don't know everything, but suggest finding out the answers together.

When a teen is moody, stay calm and react in a gentle, supportive manner.

Let him or her know that you noticed a change and that you care.

Ask him or her if there are any changes in home or school that might be causing the difference.

Ask him or her questions in a calm manner without blame. (Be prepared for answers that may surprise and shock you.)

Ask him or her if anyone else (friend, guidance counselor, youth worker, etc.) knows how they are feeling and if it is ok to talk with that person because you want to help.

Resources

It is never too late to create a positive change in a teen's life. To ensure success remember:

- Don't give up, ask questions, ask for help!
- Follow-up on the referrals and other resources you are given.
- Remember, local libraries offer free computer use for accessing Internet resources.

FOR A MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY

**Call 911 to contact Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
1-800-981-HELP to contact Boston Emergency Services team (BEST)**

FOR 24-HOUR SUPPORT

MASS Substance Abuse Hotline

Alcohol & substance abuse information and referral, children, teens and adults, all languages.
800-327-5050
www.helpine-online.com

National Hopeline Network

Connects people who are depressed or suicidal to critical services. To reach a certified crisis center in your area.
800-784-2433

Parental Stress Line

Support hotline for parents.
800-632-8188

Samaritans

Dedicated to listening to people who are feeling suicidal. Or to talk to someone about mental health issues.
617-247-0220
www.samaritansofboston.org

United Way First Call for Help

Referrals on health, education, family financial support and other social services.
800-231-4377

GENERAL RESOURCES

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Resources and help finding a child and adolescent psychiatrist.
202-966-7300
www.aacap.org

Boston Bar Association with support from

Children's Hospital Boston
How-to guide for children's mental health resources.
www.bostonbar.org/prs/BBA_howtoguide12-1-04.pdf
Call 617-778-1946

Boston Resource Net

Complete list of human/social service agencies, including search by languages spoken.
www.bostonresourcenet.org

Children's Hospital Boston Experience Journal

Families share stories on what it is like to live with a depressed child or adolescent and discuss coping strategies.
www.experiencejournal.com/depression

Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services Program for Children and Their Families

For free information about child and adolescent mental health including publications, references, and referrals to local and national resources and organizations.
call 1-800-789-2647; (TDD) 1-866-889-2647.

Federation for Children with Special Needs:

Information, referral services, and support for parents of children with disabilities.
800-331-0688

Greater Boston Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

781-891-5966
www.gbpflag.org

Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Inc.

617-742-7452
www.mamh.org

Mayor's Youth Line

Information line for youth or for parents and other caregivers in search of resources for youth.
888-635-2240 or 617-635-2240

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Massachusetts

Education programs and support groups.
Phone: 781-938-4048 Toll Free: 800-370-9085
www.namimass.org

PAL's Parent Resource Network (PRN) Line:

Provides Massachusetts residents with information, referral and support regarding child and adolescent mental health issues, and is staffed by trained family advocates.
866-815-8222

Parents Helping Parents

Hotline for finding local resources.
800-882-1250

Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PAL):

Advocacy, support groups, education, and information for parents whose children have emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs. 617-542-7860 or www.ppal.net

Samaritans:

Hotline for youth or for parents and other caregivers concerned about youth. M-F 3pm-9pm Sat. 9am-9pm
800-252-TEEN
www.samaritansofboston.org

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mayor's Health Line: Information and referral services for health and mental health resources; assistance in securing health insurance. 800-847-0710 or 617-534-5050

Health Care for All: Information and advocacy for health care; assistance in securing health insurance. 617-350-7279

Su Familia

Su Familia is a program of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health. It offers free, reliable and confidential health/mental health information in Spanish and English. Bilingual information specialists are also able to access database referrals to local primary health care services for the uninsured/ or under-insured.
866-783-2645
www.hispanichealth.org

www.talklisten.org

www.hablaelcucha.org

www.experiencejournal.com/depression

Chart inside, open here .