

How To Communicate With A Depressed Or Anxious Teen

- **Focus on listening, not lecturing.** Resist any urge to criticize or pass judgment once your teenager begins to talk. The important thing is that your child is communicating. You'll do the most good by simply letting your teen know that you're there for them, fully and unconditionally.
- **Be gentle but persistent.** Don't give up if they shut you out at first. Talking about depression can be very tough for teens. Even if they want to, they may have a hard time expressing what they're feeling. Be respectful of your child's comfort level while still emphasizing your concern and willingness to listen.
- **Acknowledge their feelings.** Don't try to talk your teen out of depression or anxiety, even if their feelings or concerns appear silly or irrational to you. Well-meaning attempts to explain why “things aren't that bad” will just come across as if you don't take their emotions seriously. To make them feel understood and supported, simply acknowledging the pain and sadness they are experiencing can go a long way in making them feel understood and supported.
- **Trust your gut.** If your teen claims nothing is wrong but has no explanation for what is causing the depressed behavior, you should trust your instincts. If your teen won't open up to you, consider turning to a trusted third party such as a school counselor, favorite teacher, or mental health professional. The important thing is to get them talking to someone.

A recent survey of young people throughout Lancaster County schools found that about 1 out of 6 reported seriously considering attempting suicide at one point in the last year. With this in mind, TeenHope has given every student we screened the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. We encourage you to put this in your contacts and use it if you suspect that a teenager you know is suicidal. Text HOME to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis counseling.

Common Ways Students Might Show They Are Distressed Even If They Deny It

- Behaving differently: Outbursts, shutting down, isolating, not completing homework.
- Using emotional words like “anxious” or “sad” or “irritated” more often.
- Presenting physical symptoms like upset stomach, jitteriness, shakiness, tenseness.
- Imagining the worst-case scenarios or having bad dreams.
- Saying negative things about themselves, e.g., “I'm stupid.”; “Nothing ever works out.”; “It's always my fault.”
- Relationships changing among family members. Is your child reacting to changes or creating issues between family members?
- Eating more/less, taking various over-the-counter medicines, missing prescribed medications, sleeping patterns are off, bags under eyes.