

Does My Teen Need Help?

Physical Warning Signs:

- ▶ Cuts on arms or legs or other physical signs of self-harm
- ▶ Rapid or major weight loss or weight gain
- ▶ Physical injuries without good explanations
- ▶ Many stomach, head, and/or back aches
- ▶ Worsening of a chronic condition

Behavioral or Emotional Warning Signs:

- ▶ Major change in eating and/or sleeping habits
- ▶ Signs of frustration, stress, or anger
- ▶ Unusual or increasing fear, anxiety, or worry
- ▶ Relationship difficulties with family, friends, classmates, or teachers
- ▶ Skipping school, not participating in class, and/or a drop in grades
- ▶ Changes or problems with energy level or concentration
- ▶ Sudden mood swings
- ▶ Feeling down, hopeless, worthless, or guilty
- ▶ Aggressive or violent behavior
- ▶ Sudden loss of self confidence or sense of security
- ▶ Risky behaviors, breaking laws, stealing, hurting people
- ▶ Signs of alcohol or drug use
- ▶ Losing interest in things that were once enjoyed
- ▶ Constant concern about physical appearance or decrease in personal hygiene
- ▶ Isolation from others and often spends time alone
- ▶ Secretive about activities and whereabouts

If you notice any of the above warning signs, talk with your teen and then call your teen's health care provider. Be ready to discuss how serious the problem is, when the problem started, and any changes in your teen's school or family situation. Don't wait too long before seeking help.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TEEN

- ☒ When and why did this problem start?
- ☒ Have you been having any thoughts about dying or hurting yourself?
- ☒ How much is this problem troubling you?
- ☒ How can I help you?
- ☒ Is the problem getting in the way of your school work or relationships with friends or family members?

Don't be afraid to ask your teen what's going on in his/her life. It will not cause any harm. A teenager in trouble needs support from caring parents.

MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

- ▶ Losing touch with reality
- ▶ In great danger of harming him/herself
- ▶ In great danger of harming others

If your teen is having an emergency, take her/him to the nearest hospital emergency room or call 911.

DO NOT leave her/him alone or unattended. Remove all dangerous items (guns, knives, pills) from your teen's reach.

Do you have any comments or questions about this handout? Please contact Adolescent Health Working Group by emailing feedback@ahwg.net or calling (415) 554-8429. Thank you.

Sources:

- 1) Goodman RF. Choosing a Mental Health Professional for Your Child. New York University Child Study Center. 2000. <http://www.aboutourkids.org>
- 2) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Mental Health Information Center. Child and Adolescent Mental Health. 2003. <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/CA-0004/default.asp>

Finding Help for My Teen

WHERE TO START

Your Teen: Talk with your teen and ask him/her:

- 1) When did this problem start and what may have caused it?
- 2) Is the problem getting in the way of school, work, or relationships with friends/family?
- 3) What can I do to help? Then make a plan together about the next steps to take.

Health Care Provider (Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Physician's Assistant):

Set up an appointment with your teen's health care provider. Be ready to discuss your family's medical and mental health history and recent changes in your teen's life. Make sure your teen spends time alone with the provider. The provider will determine if physical problems have caused your teen's symptoms. The provider can give you advice and recommend qualified mental health providers.

Private Health Insurance Plan:

Call the mental or behavioral health intake number (usually a 1-800 number) or the member services number of your teen's health insurance plan. These numbers are often located on the back of the health insurance card. The health insurance plan can tell you about the mental health and substance use services it covers and can help you set up an appointment.

Community Behavioral Health Services:

Each county in California and many other states have a county or regional mental or behavioral health access telephone line that you can call to make appointments and learn about the mental health and substance use services in your area. Community Behavioral Health usually provides services to people who have limited income, receive Medicaid benefits, and/or do not have health insurance.

School Guidance Counselor:

Your teen's school guidance counselor can offer information on local resources and counseling services offered at school and in the community. Contact the school counselor especially if your teen's behavior or emotions are getting in the way of school.

Clergy:

Clergy can sometimes offer counseling and information on peer programs, support groups, and mental health and drug or alcohol related services. These services may be provided at your place of worship or by local faith-based organizations.

Crisis Services:

If your teen has severe symptoms, there is no time to wait for an appointment. Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room. Always get help right away if your teen is in danger of hurting him/herself, hurting others, or is unable to function.

CHOOSE A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER & TREATMENT PLAN

Ask your teen's mental health provider these questions:

- ▶ What do you enjoy about working with and caring for teens? How many teens do you see each week?
- ▶ What information will be kept private between you and my teen? What information will be shared with me?
- ▶ How involved will I and my family be in my teen's treatment/counseling?
- ▶ What types of treatment are available? What are the risks and benefits of each treatment option?
- ▶ How can I tell if my teen is improving?
- ▶ What are your fees? Do you accept my teen's health insurance plan? Are your fees based upon the patient's ability to pay?

Ask your teen if he/she is comfortable with the mental health provider.

STAND UP FOR YOUR TEEN!

- ▶ Encourage your teen to ask for help.
- ▶ Learn about your teen's mental health or drug/alcohol problem and the available treatments/resources.
- ▶ Tell those who treat your teen about his/her strengths, skills, and talents. Ask mental health providers to include your teen's strengths in his/her treatment plan.
- ▶ Keep all of the documents from your teen's health care providers, teachers, and therapists. Write down any changes in your teen's mood and behavior on a calendar.
- ▶ Make sure therapists and agencies do what they promise for your teen.
- ▶ Ask for a second opinion from another mental health provider when you or your teen feels it would be helpful.

Ask your teen how you can help him/her.

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Sources:

- 1) Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Taking Charge of Your Child's Mental Health: A Parent's Guide. 2003. www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs/BH/TkngChgrChdMntlHlth.pdf
- 2) Goodman RE. Choosing a Mental Health Professional for Your Child. New York University Child Study Center, 2000. www.aboutourkids.org