

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, & MINISTRY LEADERS

MENTAL HEALTH IN TEENS

PROVIDED BY RENEWED INTEGRATIVE COUNSELING



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MENTAL HEALTH

What is mental health?

Mental health encompasses the overall well-being of an individual's mind, emotions, and psychological state. It is not merely the absence of mental disorders but involves a dynamic balance between emotional resilience, cognitive functioning, and social interactions. A person with good mental health can effectively cope with life's challenges, form meaningful relationships, and navigate the ups and downs of daily living. Mental health is a continuum, ranging from moments of stress or sadness to sustained states of flourishing and contentment. Understanding and nurturing mental health is essential for maintaining a harmonious and fulfilling life.

Why does taking care of your mental health matter?

Taking care of one's mental health is paramount because it directly influences overall well-being and quality of life. Just as we prioritize physical health to ensure our bodies function optimally, nurturing mental health is crucial for emotional resilience, clarity of thought, and the ability to handle stress. A sound mental state contributes to effective decision-making, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose. Neglecting mental health can lead to a range of challenges, from diminished productivity to the onset of mental health disorders. By investing in our mental well-being, we empower ourselves to navigate life's complexities with greater ease, fostering a positive impact not only on our own lives but also on our interactions with others in our communities.

MENTAL HEALTH IN TEENS

The teenage years can be a challenging time for both parents and teens. As your child navigates the transition from childhood to adulthood, they may experience a range of different emotions and behaviors that can be difficult to understand and deal with. It's important for parents to be aware of the signs of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and anger, and to seek out resources for help and support. This guide provides helpful information for parents who are looking to navigate these challenges through a biblical lens, offering guidance and advice for how to approach mental health issues in a way that is both compassionate and effective.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Anxiety

- Physical Symptoms: nausea, muscle tension, fatigue, headaches, rapid heartbeat, trembling sweating, etc
- Emotional/Behavioral Symptoms- excessive worry, restlessness, irritability, difficulty concentration, avoidance, agitation, perfectionism
- Cognitive symptoms- racing thoughts, catastrophizing, mind blankness, memory issues, negative self talk, etc

Depression

- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Change in sleep
- Persistent sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Irritability
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- social withdrawal,
- decreased productivity.

Self-harm

- A coping mechanism for emotional pain
- Can be physical harm or emotional harm
- Unexplained cuts or bruises
- Wearing clothes inappropriate to occasion (hoodie to the pool)
- possession of sharp objects or tools
- engaging in risky behaviors.

Eating Disorders

- Notice in weight change
- Preoccupation with body image
- intense fear of weight gain
- restrictive eating
- Excessive vomiting, exercise, or use of laxatives.
- binge eating - eating large amounts of food in a short time, eating alone

Interpersonal Relationship Issues

- Bullying from friends in person or on social media
- Toxic romantic relationship
- Unclear boundaries with friendships or romantic relationships
- Can appear through any of the mental health issues listed above.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

PRAY!

Ephesians 3:14-21, Psalms 127:1

As a parent, it's crucial to keep in mind that while it's easy to get caught up in the details and specifics of raising teenagers, the most important thing you can pray for them is that they're filled with and experience the fullness of God. Only through Him can they have everlasting peace and joy in their trials. To achieve this, it's crucial to recognize that you, as a parent, need Jesus too! While it's easy to try to be a supermom or superdad, our efforts pale in comparison to Jesus. By allowing Him to be the cornerstone and foundation of our lives, we can truly lead our children towards a life filled with His love and guidance.

Set the Example

Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4

It is important to note that teenagers often learn by example. As parents or guardians, it is essential to lead by example and model the behaviors we hope to see in our teens. This means that if we desire respect, we must first show respect. Effective communication is also crucial, and we can set the tone by communicating in a healthy and respectful manner. In addition, if we want to teach our teens to prioritize their faith, we must prioritize it ourselves. Jesus Christ, during His time on earth, not only taught the Word of God but also lived by it, setting an example for us to follow. While we may never achieve His perfection, we can strive to do so and seek forgiveness when we fall short.

Be Empathetic and Build Trust

Proverbs 15:1, Luke 15:11-31

As a parent, one of the most important things you can do for your teenager is to create a safe, judgment-free space for them to express themselves. By establishing a designated place and time for these conversations, you can build trust and show your teenager that you are there for them. In the beginning, it's important to let your teenager lead the conversation as you work on fostering a sense of safety and trust. Remember to approach each conversation with empathy and a genuine interest in your teenager. This will help them feel heard and valued, and can ultimately strengthen your bond with them.

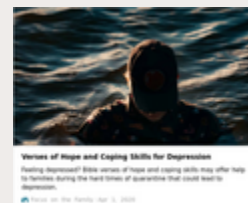
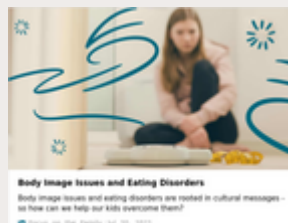
RESOURCES

The Power of a Praying Parent- Stormie Omartian

Hold onto Your Kids - Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate

The Daily Grace Company- Bible studies for depression, anxiety, grief, and more

Focus on the Family Articles:



ADDITIONAL STEPS TO ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. Promote Healthy Relationships:** Support the development of positive relationships with family, friends, and peers. Encourage healthy communication and provide guidance on navigating conflicts.
- 2. Establish Routine and Consistency:** Help teens establish and maintain a consistent daily routine. Adequate sleep, regular healthy meals, and structured activities contribute to overall well-being.
- 3. Encourage Physical Activity:** Regular exercise is essential for mental health. Encourage teens to engage in physical activities they enjoy, whether it's team sports, solo workouts, or outdoor activities.
- 4. Teach Stress Management and Coping Skills:** Equip teens with effective stress management techniques and coping skills, such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness, or engaging in creative outlets.
- 5. Foster a Positive Self-Image:** Help teens build a positive self-image by emphasizing their strengths and achievements. Encourage a healthy sense of self-worth and resilience.
- 6. Limit Screen Time:** Set reasonable limits on screen time, especially on social media. Discuss the potential impact of excessive screen use on mental health and encourage a healthy balance.
- 7. Provide Opportunities for Learning and Growth:** Support teens in pursuing hobbies, interests, and learning experiences that contribute to their personal development and a sense of accomplishment.
- 8. Discuss Mental Health:** Openly discuss the importance of mental health and destigmatize seeking help. Let teens know it's okay to ask for support and that mental health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being.
- 9. Provide Access to Professional Support:** If concerns persist or worsen, seek the assistance of mental health professionals, such as counselors, therapists, or psychologists, who specialize in adolescent mental health.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

- 1. Persistent Changes in Behavior:** If there are persistent and significant changes in a teen's behavior, such as sudden withdrawal, extreme mood swings, or aggressive behavior.
- 2. Academic Decline:** A prolonged decline in academic performance, difficulty concentrating, or a noticeable change in enthusiasm for learning may warrant professional assessment.
- 3. Social Isolation:** If a teen consistently isolates themselves, avoids social interactions, or experiences challenges in forming and maintaining friendships.
- 4. Sleep Disturbances:** Persistent sleep disturbances, whether it's difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing nightmares, may indicate underlying mental health issues.
- 5. Expressing Hopelessness:** Verbalizing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or expressing a lack of interest in the future should be taken seriously.
- 6. Physical Complaints without Medical Cause:** Frequent complaints of physical ailments (headaches, stomachaches) without a medical explanation may be signs of emotional distress.
- 7. Engaging in Risky Behaviors:** If a teen starts engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, self-harm, or other dangerous activities, immediate professional help is necessary.
- 8. Drastic Changes in Eating Habits:** Significant changes in eating habits, whether it's excessive eating or a sudden loss of appetite, may be indicative of mental health concerns.
- 9. Excessive Anxiety or Worry:** If a teen experiences excessive anxiety, worries excessively about various aspects of life, and it interferes with their daily functioning.
- 10. Loss of Interest in Previously Enjoyed Activities:** A sudden loss of interest in activities that the teen used to enjoy may signify emotional struggles.
- 11. Suicidal Thoughts or Self-Harm:** Any indication of suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or expressions of a desire to die requires immediate professional intervention.



Jesus wants us to live life feeling whole and secure in His love and unashamed to ask for help when needed. We are living in a time where mental health difficulties have shown up like never before in God's children. Mental health challenges have become a barrier to change, growth, and living with purpose for so many Christians. God does not want his children living in fear, depression, anxiety, panic, inadequacy, grief, etc. Nevertheless, these are valid feelings that show up and have to be addressed.

Negative feelings may be uncomfortable, but they are necessary signals in our body that tell us that something is wrong in our thinking, our environment, or our spirit. The purpose for these signals is to prompt awareness and need. Still, many believers have allowed negative feelings to literally control almost every decision and outcome in their lives.

It is time for the body of Christ to firmly acknowledge that mental health struggles are real. Taking action to better our mental health will help us to freely build our lives centered in the love and grace of Christ, His word, and live out our purpose to move His kingdom forward. We are done with the enemy setting up camp in the minds of God's children. It is time for us to make the health of our mind just as important as physical health.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a **sound mind**.

2 Timothy 1:7

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