



Teens are halfway between childhood and adulthood – they are still finding themselves and learning to live in their own skin. As a result, it is common for teens to exhibit undesirable behaviors, such as lashing out, isolating, or making risky decisions. However, when does undesirable teen behavior start to indicate mental health issues in a teenager? It is not always easy to tell.

Mental illness during adolescence is remarkably common, and adolescence is often the time when symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other conditions first emerge with a person. Accordingly, parents, family members, and guardians need to understand the signs and symptoms of mental illness in teens.

## Teens and Mental Health: What is Normal Behavior?

Growing up is hard, increased responsibilities are stressful, and emotions are difficult to manage. One would be hard-pressed to find an adult who manages their responsibilities, emotions, and relationships in a healthy way 100 percent of the time.

The pressures of responsibilities, emotions, and relationships can be particularly intense among teens and young adults, as they have not learned how to manage many difficult aspects of life at their young age. Also, their brains are still developing, and it is very common for teens to act unreasonably or engage in risky behavior.

## Signs of Mental Illness in Teens to Watch Out For

Instead of explaining what qualifies as healthy behavior, it may be easier to detail which behaviors often indicate possible adolescent mental health issues.

If your teen's behavior includes the behaviors listed below, talk to him about what he is going through or find a trusted adult to take on the task. Behaviors that parents and guardians should look out for among teens include:

- Missing days in school or poor school performance
- Avoiding friends and social life
- Losing interest in activities
- Not having motivation for fun or exciting activities
- Sleeping disturbances, including insomnia and nightmares

- Not sitting still or focusing on tasks
- Seeming chronically anxious or worried
- Lacking energy or oversleeping
- Bouncing between moods of no-energy and hyperactivity
- Actions of self-harm, including cutting, picking, burning, biting, or hair pulling
- Having suicidal thoughts or actions
- Being irritable or unreasonable constantly
- Engaging in manic and risky behavior such as car races, unsafe sex, or dangerous thrill-seeking activities
- Feeling like an external entity is controlling their thoughts or actions or hearing voices
- Smoking, taking drugs, or drinking

Although experimenting with drugs or alcohol is not an encouraged or healthy activity, it may not necessarily suggest a substance abuse condition. However, if a teen engages in drug or alcohol use and also engages in the other behaviors listed above, this combination of behaviors would indicate a red flag.

Keep an eye on your teen to see if they exhibit the warning signs listed above, and talk to them about any behaviors that concern you. A simple conversation can help you decide if their behavior warrants a professional help or a clinical treatment program.

## Common Types of Mental Illness in Adolescents

Many types of mental health disorders first emerge during adolescence, such as depression, anxiety, and even ADHD. Additionally, schizophrenia often first appears during young adulthood or later teenage years.

Although mental health conditions often have a genetic factor, environmental conditions can also contribute to a condition's onset. In many cases, ADHD does not manifest until puberty, and minor forms of autism may not become apparent until early teenage years.



Below, we list several common mental health issues among adolescents:

- Teen depression, which includes isolation and a lack of interest in activities
- Anxiety, which includes constant worrying and being on-edge
- Bipolar disorder, which includes periods of extreme highs and lows
- Substance use disorder, which includes using drugs or alcohol
- Borderline personality disorder, which includes insecurity, feelings of worthlessness, and trouble forming social relationships
- Schizophrenia, which includes disorganized speech and being out of touch with reality
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which includes avoiding people or places, drastic changes in behavior, and risky behavior
- Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, which includes constant irritability and reacting unreasonably to almost all situations
- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which includes compulsive behavior, extreme yet limited interests, self-harm, and compulsive or repetitive speech or actions
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which includes the inability to focus on one task, falling behind in school, and forgetfulness

## **Where and How to Get Help for Teen Mental Health Issues**

Mental health issues with teenagers can be a touchy subject. Teens may not be willing to express their feelings and emotions if they do not think you will greet them with complete support. This phenomenon is even more evident in teens who naturally distrust their parents due to their parents' roles as authority figures.

If you are worried that your teen may not open up to you, find an adult that the teen can trust to talk with the teen. From there, you can talk together with your teen about seeking treatment at a mental health facility for teenagers.

<https://www.georgetownbehavioral.com/blog/normal-teenage-behavior-or-mental-health-issue>