

Help Teens Avoid Mental Health Issues

Today, more teens deal with mental health issues than in the past 60 years. They report feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. Anti-social behavior is on the rise. Many teens disregard rules and have trouble with authority. Their behavior includes fighting and running away from home.

Teens with mental health issues often self-medicate. They use drugs, tobacco and alcohol that can lead to addictions.

First-year college students report low levels of emotional health. Overwhelmed and stressed, many seek counseling. Some college students report anxiety from a pressure to succeed. Many believe that being rich is a measure of success.

When some teens leave home, they find life to be stressful. Over-protective parents fail to prepare them for living on their own. They lack the life-skills to do laundry, clean, budget and problem-solve.

How can parents protect their teens? A new study suggests that optimism may help. Optimists believe that good can happen in life. They also know that bad occurs. However, **optimists** believe that they can *make* good come their way.



The study found that optimism provided:

- A strong protection against depression, and
- Some protection against anxiety, substance abuse and anti-social behavior.

Parents should model an optimistic attitude. However, optimism alone is not the answer. They should also:

- Watch their teen for changes in behavior. If needed, seek help right away.
- Know their family's history. If family members have a history of anxiety, depression or alcoholism, the teen may be at-risk.

- Teach life skills and coping-skills. Skilled teens are more confident when they leave home.
- Work *with* their teen to solve problems. Do not just solve their problems.
- Discuss what success means. Money and possessions do not bring happiness.
- Know that when you say say “*You can do anything*” you can set up false hopes. Instead, teach your teen to focus on working hard at whatever he does.
- Support their teen during a crisis. Coping skills help teens deal with divorce, death, family move or other crises.

Parents must prepare their teen to live on their own. Armed with skills and optimism, a teen can cope with life's many challenges.

For coping and resiliency skills, see the *Resiliency Booklet* in the Teen Section under Behavior.

Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital to help keep kids safe, healthy and happy.



Call the Parent Help Line. Help is just a phone call away.

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889
10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week
www.parenthelpline.org

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