

# Tips to help parents when teens struggle with mental health issues

*The following is excerpted from the article, [“Many teens struggle with mental health issues. Here are tips for parents,”](#) by Jenny Taitz of *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2022.*

While teens crave autonomy, the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain that manages thinking flexibly and managing impulses — continues to develop until age 25, which means that however mature they seem, your teen needs adult help when it comes to regulating emotions and handling crises.

When your teen is struggling with mental health issues, parents may inadvertently say the wrong thing such as, “you’re overreacting.” Sometimes they offer children too much space, assuming their teenager will come to them with a problem. But there are effective ways to empower your adolescent, including working on managing your own emotions, asking the right questions and helping to determine the level of support they need.

- 1. Practice being kind and nonjudgmental:** To increase the likelihood of your teen opening up to you in hard times, it’s helpful to be open and warm in ordinary moments. It can also help to remind yourself that feeling distress is part of being a teen/young adult.
- 2. Don’t be a “snowplow parent”:** It’s not your job to remove any potential problems your adolescent is facing. Experiencing and coping with mistakes and failures can help young adults grow and find their purpose,
- 3. Give them hope:** If your teen is struggling with issues more serious than average stress, such as depression or anxiety, let them know that what they’re experiencing isn’t permanent and that feeling better is possible and within reach.
- 4. Ask about self-harm thoughts:** If you’re concerned that your child is considering suicide or self-harm, it is best to find a way to ask about that directly.
- 5. Lean on research-based approaches:** As a parent, you can call crisis hotlines and use tools, such as the Stanley-Brown safety plan, and share these with your teen, giving them some agency over what seems helpful to them. While waiting to meet with a professional, the crisis text line, the national hotline 988 are helpful resources.

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