

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

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2021-2022 News & Notes



2022 June News and Notes

“How to Help Vulnerable Teens”

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

How to Help Vulnerable Teens

Adolescence is a time of unique development, during which young people are learning to interact with the world in new ways. It is often a time of intense emotions, including stress, anxiety and depression. Parents can help their children navigate this important period by remaining open and approachable, and especially by building their own ability to problem solve and handle difficult issues.

Among the safeguards parents can offer teens to minimize problems is to make sure that they are getting adequate nutrition and sleep, and encourage their children to adopt healthy ways to manage stress and overwhelming emotions, such as exercise, meditation and journaling.

In his presentation, Dr. Sutton assured parents that while adolescence is a time of individuation and identity development, children “still want to turn to their parents” when they have a problem. When children can talk with their parents about their feeling, they feel relief: they are not alone with these intense emotions. It’s important, therefore, for parents to overcome their own fear of difficult feelings, and “develop a tolerance for distress,” in order to be available for problem solving with their children.

Richtel advises adults to recognize the signs of distress. “Look for changes in a youth’s behavior, such as disinterest in eating or altered sleep patterns. A teen in distress may express excessive worry, hopelessness or profound sadness.”

When approaching their children about it, Richtel advises parents, “be clear and direct. Don’t shy from hard questions, but also approach the issue with compassion and not blame.”

Dr. Sutton emphasized that if parents have concerns about their children’s emotional health, they must not wait for it to pass, hoping for things to get better. It is vital that parents ask children about what’s going on, and not hesitate to get professional help if necessary.

Yet there is hope for recovery, Richtel writes,

Health experts note that, for all its weight, the adolescent crisis at least is unfolding in a more accepting environment. Mental health issues have shed much of the stigma they carried three decades ago, and parents and adolescents alike are more at ease when discussing the subject among themselves and seeking help.

Additional links:

American Hospital Association: <https://www.aha.org/mental-health-awareness-month>

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Postpartum Support International: [May 4, 2022 – World Maternal Mental Health Day](#)

Family Involvement Center: [May 1-7, 2022 – National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week](#)