

# HURTING TEENS: HOW TO TELL YOUR PARENTS

I know how difficult it is to tell your parents you're hurting; often you feel that they won't believe you, they'll be annoyed, or they'll over react and lock away the butter knives thus making you feel even more miserable. It's difficult to get the nerve to confront your parents about your depression or anxiety. However - you aren't going to get better by hiding it, so going to your parents as soon as you realize something is wrong is the best choice. Here are a few tips to make the confrontation easier.

**One:** Be prepared for a barrage of questions. Parents aren't going to hear "I think I'm depressed/anxious" and respond with "oh, cool." You need to be prepared for them to ask "why?" "how do you feel?" "what's upsetting you?" Sometimes you simply won't know what it is, but try to give it some thought. Are your friends shutting you out? Do you feel that your parents are too busy with their daily lives to spend time with you? Are your emotions swinging around madly due to hormones? There's a difference between mood swings and a mental illness; one of the major differences is duration - mood swings often change throughout the day, whereas true mental illnesses tends to settle on a teen for weeks at a time.

**Two:** Have someone else tell your parents. Some people might consider this a cop-out, but sometimes you really just can't bring yourself to admit something like this! A trusted friend, a sibling, a pastor, whomever you feel safe telling and asking to be your intermediary can go to your parents and explain that there is an issue, and you simply didn't know how to approach them. Don't feel bad for doing what makes you feel safe - you're getting help, that's all that matters.

**Three:** Along with two, if you don't feel comfortable asking someone else to go to your parents, write them a letter! I used to exchange notes with my mom all the time and it was really a comfortable way for me to present the way I was feeling about things. It's easier to write things down on paper and it feels safer to be honest with the ability to backspace and reword as needed.

**Four:** Don't lie to your parents. If you start to tell them and they don't react in a receptive manner, don't immediately respond by backtracking over everything you just said. Commit! You need help, and they are in the position to be sure you get it. Be one hundred percent honest with your parents, you don't want them to ever have any doubt as to the authenticity of your claim and lying to them is an excellent way to create the doubt you wanted to avoid.

**Five:** Don't diagnose yourself. The problem with the internet is while it gives it so much information - it also gives us way too much access to things that we aren't qualified to examine. You may have taken thirty tests online that say you're depressed, you're bipolar, you have a personality disorder - but only a real therapist can make that diagnosis.

**Six:** Describe how you feel. Not how you think you should feel, not how the internet says you should feel, not how your parents think you feel. Don't presume that you need to fit a stereotype, or fit all of the definitions of depression/anxiety/etc. Follow through - if they're getting you help, don't suddenly change your story on them.

**Seven:** They *want* to help you! Never will your parents find it an inconvenience to help their child recover from something as upsetting as a mental illness - don't feel guilty in any way for asking them to help you.

**Eight:** Don't be afraid of them! They're your *parents*!