

THE DIFFERENCE

between a moody teen & a mental health problem

Let's be real: Teenagers are weird. Adolescents are going through a ton of changes, most notably trying to figure out how they are unique while simultaneously trying to find where they belong. They are still learning who it is they are. Because of this, it can be difficult to recognize when a teenager is going through typical development or if they are showing signs of a possible illness or problem.

TYPICAL TEEN DEVELOPMENT

- Increased need for sleep, sleeping in more
- Increased appetite, weight gain during growth spurts
- Spending less time with family, more time with friends/social group
- Changing hobbies, replacing childhood interests with more age-appropriate activities (like graduating from matchbox cars to football)
- Desire for more independence and privacy
- More drama — experiencing hardships, heartbreak, stress, and other difficult situations, but can cope and move on from the experience
- Growing pains
- Reluctance to go to school
- Light risk-taking and experimentation, like breaking rules, drugs, and alcohol
- Turning to a family pet for emotional comfort instead of a friend or family member

SIGNS OF A PROBLEM

- ! Always tired, fatigued, never getting enough sleep — or having trouble sleeping
- ! Significant weight gain or loss — typically 5% or more change in either direction
- ! Withdrawing from all social interaction
- ! Quitting all hobbies and activities, not replacing old interests with new ones
- ! Acting secretive, as if they are hiding something
- ! Getting “stuck” in a situation, unable to cope or move past it after sufficient time has passed
- ! Unexplained aches and pains, a sense that something “is not right”, especially in negative situations
- ! Total refusal to go to school, leave house, leave room
- ! Extremely risky behavior including disregard for home rules, societal law, and turning to substances or self-injury as a form of escape or coping
- ! Purposefully harming or torturing any animals

If you are noticing warning signs in your teen, talk with them. Be direct – tell them the signs you are seeing and that you are worried. Schedule a doctor's appointment for follow up.