

Finding Help for My Teen

WHERE TO START

Your Teen: Talk with your teen and ask him/her:

- 1) When did this problem start and what may have caused it?
- 2) Is the problem getting in the way of school, work, or relationships with friends/family?
- 3) What can I do to help? Then make a plan together about the next steps to take.

Health Care Provider (Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Physician's Assistant):

Set up an appointment with your teen's health care provider. Be ready to discuss your family's medical and mental health history and recent changes in your teen's life. Make sure your teen spends time alone with the provider. The provider will determine if physical problems have caused your teen's symptoms. The provider can give you advice and recommend qualified mental health providers.

Private Health Insurance Plan:

Call the mental or behavioral health intake number (usually a 1-800 number) or the member services number of your teen's health insurance plan. These numbers are often located on the back of the health insurance card. The health insurance plan can tell you about the mental health and substance use services it covers and can help you set up an appointment.

Community Behavioral Health Services:

Each county in California and many other states have a county or regional mental or behavioral health access telephone line that you can call to make appointments and learn about the mental health and substance use services in your area. Community Behavioral Health usually provides services to people who have limited income, receive Medicaid benefits, and/or do not have health insurance.

School Guidance Counselor:

Your teen's school guidance counselor can offer information on local resources and counseling services offered at school and in the community. Contact the school counselor especially if your teen's behavior or emotions are getting in the way of school.

Clergy:

Clergy can sometimes offer counseling and information on peer programs, support groups, and mental health and drug or alcohol related services. These services may be provided at your place of worship or by local faith-based organizations.

Crisis Services:

If your teen has severe symptoms, there is no time to wait for an appointment. Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room. Always get help right away if your teen is in danger of hurting him/herself, hurting others, or is unable to function.

**CHOOSE A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER
& TREATMENT PLAN**

Ask your teen's mental health provider these questions:

- ▶ What do you enjoy about working with and caring for teens? How many teens do you see each week?
- ▶ What information will be kept private between you and my teen? What information will be shared with me?
- ▶ How involved will I and my family be in my teen's treatment/counseling?
- ▶ What types of treatment are available? What are the risks and benefits of each treatment option?
- ▶ How can I tell if my teen is improving?
- ▶ What are your fees? Do you accept my teen's health insurance plan? Are your fees based upon the patient's ability to pay?

Ask your teen if he/she is comfortable with the mental health provider.

STAND UP FOR YOUR TEEN!

- ▶ Encourage your teen to ask for help.
- ▶ Learn about your teen's mental health or drug/alcohol problem and the available treatments/resources.
- ▶ Tell those who treat your teen about his/her strengths, skills, and talents. Ask mental health providers to include your teen's strengths in his/her treatment plan.
- ▶ Keep all of the documents from your teen's health care providers, teachers, and therapists. Write down any changes in your teen's mood and behavior on a calendar.
- ▶ Make sure therapists and agencies do what they promise for your teen.
- ▶ Ask for a second opinion from another mental health provider when you or your teen feels it would be helpful.

Ask your teen how you can help him/her.

Do you have any comments or questions about this handout? Please contact Adolescent Health Working Group by emailing feedback@ahwg.net or calling (415) 554-8429. Thank you.

Sources:
1) Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Taking Charge of Your Child's Mental Health: A Parent's Guide. 2003, www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs/BH/TkngChgrChdMntlHlth.pdf
2) Goodman RF. Choosing a Mental Health Professional for Your Child. New York University Child Study Center, 2000, www.aboutourkids.org