



HOUSE *of* HOPE<sup>®</sup>

# 7 SIGNS

Your Teen

*Needs Help*





# HOUSE *of* HOPE®

If you're reading this, you have likely found yourself—like most parents—concerned about the well-being of your teenager. We imagine this has left you feeling both discouraged and powerless at times.

Most parents of students who come to House of Hope say the same thing—they didn't see the warning signs that their teen needed help—they didn't know what to look for in their teen's behavior. Perhaps you're also concerned you're missing the signs with your teen.

Or maybe you're a youth leader with troubled teens in your youth group or a teacher observing teens who draw your concern coming in and out of your classroom.

That's why **Karla Mathis**, President of House of Hope, is offering this guide to help you navigate the signs that go beyond "normal" teenage behavior, provide you with tools and resources for getting outside help for your teen, and empower you to feel confident moving forward.

With over 35 years of experience helping troubled teens heal and move into healthy, happy relationships with their families, House of Hope is here to help you navigate the often- rocky road of raising teens. Above all, we want you to know you're not alone, there is hope, and no teenager is ever too far gone.



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## 02 INTRODUCTION

There is a level of fear and depression that can come over teenagers that may not make sense to those around them. But it is very real to them and often requires loving help to overcome.

They can be mean, hard to get along with, and irrational. Some of this behavior is normal. The teenage brain does not reach full maturity until about age 25. But how do you know when “normal” teenage behavior has moved into something more serious?

How do you know when your teen needs help?

When it comes to your teen, it’s essential that you don’t brush off signs and symptoms of a troubled teen in need of help. If you’re concerned, it’s time to tune in and take steps to help your teen heal and get the help they need.

Emotional problems, stress, relationship issues, mental health issues, or past trauma can all contribute to a teen in trouble.

When evaluating your situation, you must look at all the pieces, not just one sign.

*If you feel completely out of control, all is not lost.  
When teens act out,  
it is a cry for help — a cry for hope.*



## WATCHING FOR THE SIGNS 03

### 1 Depression

A teen's moods naturally and normally have highs and lows. It's a trying time! They can be irrational, irritable, and disrespectful.

But there is a difference between typical teen behavior and extremes, which is where the cause for concern comes in. An estimated 20% of teenagers will experience depression before adulthood. In fact, 7 in 10 U.S. teens say anxiety and depression are major problems among their peers.<sup>[i]</sup>

What's more, the recent infliction of isolation on students and teens across America have caused a marked increase in rates of depression.

As a parent, how do you know if your teen is dealing with typical teenage moods and depression?

<sup>[i]</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/12/a-growing-number-of-american-teenagers-particularly-girls-are-facing-depression/>

Here are some of the symptoms of depression to look for:

- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Depressed mood
- Acting out or having meltdowns
- Significant weight loss or gain
- A drastic change in clothing styles
- A major change in hygiene
- Fatigue
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Slowed thinking
- Indecisiveness or difficulty concentrating
- They stop looking you in the eye or engaging with the family
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Signs of self-harm such as cuts, burns, bruises, etc.



Remember, teen depression isn't just something they need to get over. It can have severe consequences if left untreated. If your teen has been struggling with depression, there are things you can do as a parent.

### What to do:

- Contact a mental health professional for counseling ([Click here](#))
- Reach out to your pastor or youth leader
- Encourage your teen to talk to a coach, teacher, friend or family member. They are often more comfortable talking to someone other than a parent at first.
- Help them to get plugged in to a youth group, academic club or team.



## 2 Declining School Performance

Another sign your teen may need help is a significant drop in school performance. If your child is usually consistent in their grades, a sudden or random drop in performance is something to address.

Other causes of declining school performance could include changing schools, increasing extra-curricular activities, or new teachers and more challenging classes. There could also possibly be a learning disorder involved.

If none of this is the case, it could be a sign of an underlying issue with your teen that needs addressing. It can be a symptom of a greater problem emotionally.

Family trouble, parents divorcing, or a death in the family can cause significant emotional hardship to anyone—especially a teenager. These types of traumas cannot go without attention. A teenager needs the ability to process, vent, forgive, and heal.

## 3 Changes in Friends

During middle and high school years, teens spend more and more time with their friends and are significantly influenced by their social circles. In fact, you may see far less of your teen than their friends do!

As you're watching over your teen's well-being, it's essential to be mindful of changes in friends. While making new friends is expected, a sign that your teen may need help is abandoning old friends and hanging out with an entirely new group of people you do not know.

If a questionable new friend group is coupled with a change in behavior and attitude, this is a sign of trouble. Don't wait for more extreme symptoms and signs of a need for help. Open the lines of communication with your teen now.



# Hope can change everything.

## 4 Increasing Rebellion

Parents often expect their teenagers to be rebellious, which can lead to missing the signs of trouble or waiting too long to get help, hoping things will work out.

While some teen rebellion is expected (but should never be tolerated), there is a difference between an itch for independence and at-risk behavior.

So how do you know when to intervene beyond the usual disciplinary action?

First, you must seek help sooner than later when you're concerned about your teen, especially when you're seeing increased rebellion and anger. If you wait, things sometimes only get worse.

It's time to find assistance if your situation includes any of the following:

- Your teen's behavior is becoming more intense and on the verge of being dangerous
- Your teen is not functioning as they need to in order to succeed in school or relationships
- Your home has become volatile, angry, and unsafe emotionally or physically

If you are concerned about the level of rebellion or anger your teen is displaying, **please call House of Hope at 855-253-HOPE.**

## 5 Excessive Isolation

Teens tend to like time alone. But when isolation becomes excessive, this is a cause for concern. Isolation can lead to social media addiction, depression, disturbed sleep patterns, and changes in eating habits.

If your teen refuses to spend time with the family or seems locked away in their room all the time, it's time to get help.



You can address this issue immediately in your home by doing the following:

- **Get your teen outside.** Invite them to go on a hike or shoot some baskets. They may like TopGolf or mini golf. If you have a pickleball court nearby, grab some inexpensive gear and challenge them to a fun game on the court. Pickleball is one of the more popular outdoor activities among teens today.

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- **Encourage volunteering.** Find something your teen loves doing and turn it into community service! For example, if your teen likes pets, ask if they would like to volunteer at a shelter.
- **Unplug.** Turn off internet access at a particular time each day and place time limits on devices. If the excuse comes, “I have homework!” Tell your teen that it would be a good idea to get it done within the timeframe. It must be done in a common family area if more time is needed.
- **Eat Dinner as a Family.** Research shows that families who sit down to dinner 3-5 times per week have children who get better grades, have higher self-esteem, and are less likely to use drugs, alcohol, smoke, or be sexually active. Kids and teens who eat with their families also have lower rates of depression and suicide. Eating as a family can help keep your teen from unhealthy isolation.

If none of the above seems to make a change, reach out to a pastor or counselor and get help for your teen.

## 6 Sleeping All the Time

Teenagers need a lot of sleep! And they often stay up late, which causes them to sleep longer in the morning.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 9 to 10 hours of sleep per night for teens aged 13-18. So your teen needs more sleep than adults or younger children, and it is not a cause for concern.

Sleeping all the time, on the other hand, is a sign that your teen needs help. After you’ve ruled out any potential physical problems, excessive sleep (more than 10 hours, napping in the middle of the day, etc.) can be the symptom of a deeper issue, like depression.

## 7 Changes in Appetite

This can signal trouble if your teen seems to hardly be eating anything anymore.

Depression, anger, and rebellion can all lead to changes in appetite. Overeating can also be a sign that your teen needs help.

If you suspect an eating disorder, including signs that your teen may purge after a meal, it is time to get help immediately.





## WHERE TO FIND HELP 07

**At House of Hope, we strongly advocate for the involvement of the family and the teen in solving life's biggest challenges and problems.**

When you can reach into the soul of a teen and offer the transforming power of Christ, there is always hope. Not one teen has to be lost. Families can be restored. We see it at House of Hope every day.

Remember, the goal isn't simply to change the behaviors listed in this guide—it is to achieve healing in your teen's heart. These emotional wounds take time to heal and often involve working through hurts, which often come from parents, even unknowingly. Forgiveness is usually a huge part of the healing process for teens.

But this type of emotional healing most often cannot be done alone.

House of Hope recommends the following to parents, youth leaders, or teachers dealing with a teenager who needs help:

**1 Seek Out the Help of a Counselor.** Remember, it is not only the teen who needs counseling. Parents should also seek counseling to determine what areas need healing in their own lives and how they can relate to their teens in a healthier, more effective way.

**2 Get Them Plugged In.** A youth group, academic group, club, or team can help greatly. Remember, their peers potentially have the most significant influence, so they must have access to peers who have a positive outlook and are living healthy. It also provides countless opportunities to build self-esteem, learn and grow, and develop skills for the future.





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