



Supporting Teen Mental Health

A Parent's Guide to Adolescent Mental Health

Teen mental health is a crucial topic for parents, educators, and healthcare providers alike. As our children go through the physical, emotional and social changes of adolescence they can be vulnerable to mental health issues. Sometimes, as parents, it's hard to know whether we are witnessing a genuine mental health issue or part of the normal transition for a teenager. This article is designed to help you to identify the early warning signs and give you some definitive, easy next steps that you can take.

The latest statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare highlight the urgency of addressing mental health issues in young people:

- 1 in 7 young Australians aged 4-17 experienced a mental health disorder in the last 12 months.
- Suicide remains the leading cause of death for young Australians aged 15-24.
- Over 50% of mental health disorders begin by the age of 14.

These frightening statistics emphasise the need for early intervention and support to help our teens.

Recognising the Signs: Does Your Child Need Support?

It can be stressful wondering if your child is suffering from mental health issues. Parents are well placed to notice warning signs and red flags; however, it's possible that your child might keep their mental health from you in order to reduce your stress and worry.

There is no one-size-fits-all for mental health, however, the following list will help you to identify some potential red flags:

Changes in Mood and Behaviour: This could include noticeable mood swings, persistent sadness, or irritability. Talking about feeling hopeless or worthless or avoiding friends, family, or activities they used to enjoy or engaging in dangerous activities or substance abuse can also highlight an issue.

Academic Performance: A sudden decline in grades or loss of interest in school. Perhaps your child's teachers have noticed a change in behaviour or friendship groups.

Changes to Sleeping or Eating: Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much. Changes in appetite or weight.

Physical Symptoms: Unexplained headaches, stomach aches, or other physical complaints.

If you notice any of these signs, it's important to take them seriously and consider exploring professional support. Remember to trust your instinct as a parent, as you know your child better than anyone.

Exploring Support Options

More than 50% of children experiencing mental health challenges are not receiving professional support, which can impact the severity of their symptoms. There are several ways that support can help and various stakeholders who can assist.

Your role as parents

As a parent, your role in supporting your teen's mental health is pivotal. You can support your child through open communication and fostering an environment where your child feels safe to talk about their feelings without judgement or advice. Try to demonstrate positive coping mechanisms and self-care routines yourself (think about how you can do this a little more openly the next time you are feeling angry or sad). It's important to support and encourage your child's relationships with their friends and family so they also have other members in their support crew.

TIP: When a child is sharing their feelings try to listen rather than to problem-solve. A great phrase to use is "Tell me more" or "I'm really glad you are speaking to me about this".

The role of a GP and professional help

General Practitioners (GPs) are an excellent first point of contact for mental health concerns. Parents can contact a GP to discuss their observations either with or without their child in the first instance. Some GPs have a special interest in adolescent mental health and are very experienced in providing initial support and helping you to understand what options are available as a next step. Once you understand what you are dealing with, your GP can assist you in providing additional scaffolding at home for your child, as well as advocating for their particular needs in other environments.

GPs can provide referrals to any specialists that might be required and provide a consistent base for ongoing support to both the parents and the child throughout this journey. Local GPs, like those at Evercare Clayfield, can be invaluable in providing the right support.

Take Action

If you have any concerns about your child's mental health, it's best to address them sooner rather than later. Speak to your child's teachers and make an appointment with a GP who can use their expertise to assist you. Remember that no two scenarios are exactly the same, so keep an open mind to the best pathway for your child.

Supporting your child's mental health is an ongoing responsibility that involves vigilance, understanding, and professional assistance. By recognising the signs, exploring support options, and taking proactive steps, you can make a significant difference in your child's life.



This article was written by [Dr Wendy Chow](#), GP at Evercare Clayfield. Dr Chow has a special interest in mental health and wellbeing and particularly enjoys offering care across paediatric, adolescent, and women's health.

[Evercare Clayfield](#) is a local clinic who offers a unique GP service with fast appointments and a free healthcare membership for children under 16 (with a paying adult). They also provide healthcare to Clayfield College's Boarding House and can be contacted on 07 3608 1400 or hello@evercare.com.au.