

## The Seriously Depressed Teen

There are few of us who haven't felt depressed at some point. Depression is not an absolute. Its seriousness depends on its degree. Most teens will have mood swings as part of their rollercoaster trip through adolescence. Mild depression can be described as a felling of being "down" for a day or two. But serious depression is more than the blues. It is a medical problem.

Unfortunately, because our culture expects teens to have emotional ups and downs, a parent may assume a youngster's mood problem is "just a phase" – thus many cases of teen depression go undiagnosed. Untreated, serious depression can affect a child's future happiness and success in school, work and relationships, and put him or her at high risk for recurring or chronic depression. Even more troubling is the relationship between youthful depression and suicide. Now the second-leading cause of death for those 15-24, suicide in this age group has tripled in the past 30 years.

### Signs of serious depression

Here is a checklist of warning signs that may indicate serious depression.

- ♥ Persistent feelings of sadness

- ♥ Loss of interest in activities and friends
- ♥ Change in weight – loss or gain; Sleep problems – sleeping too much, can't sleep, or won't get out of bed.



- ♥ Loss of energy, tiredness
- ♥ Feeling worthless, guilty or hopeless
- ♥ Difficulty concentrating
- ♥ Changes in appearance (skipping showers, not caring about clothes)
- ♥ A drop in school grades or performance
- ♥ Skipping school
- ♥ Smoking, drugs, or alcohol use
- ♥ Talk or writing of death or suicide

### When to take action

- ♥ When a group of these symptoms occurs together
- ♥ When they represent changes from usual behavior
- ♥ When the changes persist for more than two weeks

### What to do

- ♥ Ask teachers, siblings, or the child's friends if they have concerns about your child.
- ♥ Talk to the school guidance counselor, your family doctor or a social worker
- ♥ Act promptly if referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist
- ♥ If your child enters therapy, don't hesitate to ask questions, express concerns and become involved in the effort to help bring about a return to good health

## Check These Out!

Public libraries have many books, tapes and videos about parenting and child development. Use your library card to check out these and other excellent resources. Invite your young student along to check out books or tapes, too.

For special resources related to parent education and support in your community, contact local social services, schools, hospitals, libraries or United Way.

### Lonely, sad, and angry : a parent's guide to depression in children and adolescents /

Barbara D. Ingersoll and Sam Goldstein. (B)

### Adolescent depression: a guide for parents /

Francis Mark Mondimore. (B)

### Saying no is not enough: raising children who make wise decisions about drugs and alcohol /

Robert Schwebel. (B)

### Teens under the influence: the truth about kids, alcohol, and other drugs— how to recognize the problem and what to do about it /

Katherine Ketcham and Nicholas A. Pace. (B)

(B) book

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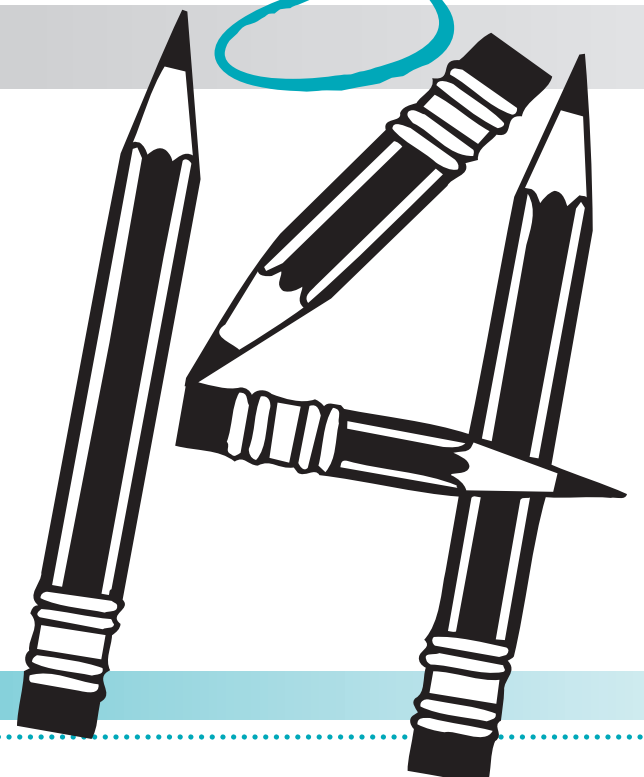
# Healthy Stages

## 9TH GRADE

**T**ips for Parents of Ninth-Graders. *Healthy Stages* is a free, once-a-year newsletter. It is designed to reach you during your child's current grade in school. Every effort has been made to pack its short articles with helpful facts. We suggest you keep *Healthy Stages* around for the entire school year. Put it in a folder with other important information about your child. Refer to it

from time to time. Its articles may help you deal with a problem or try a new approach in parenting.

We hope you look forward to all that this year brings. And we hope you'll turn to *Healthy Stages* often. We want to help you make this school year one that both you and your child will remember with joy.



# The Transition To High School

Your ninth-grader is beginning what may be the single most important chapter in his or her development – both emotional and educational.

Both boys and girls are now well into adolescence. Physical changes continue to provide evidence of maturing bodies. Emotional ups and downs are signs both of hormonal changes and the teen's emerging need to establish an independent identity.

High school will present some important lifestyle choices and dilemmas. Your teen will be confronted with older students' examples and peer pressures related to smoking, drinking alcohol, experimenting with drugs, and becoming sexually active. A parent today must take seriously the challenge to keep a teen informed about the health risks of each of these choices.

Guidance counselors say the sudden onset of academic independence that comes with high school can be hard for a ninth-grader to handle. Now is the time for a parent to model and teach a teen good time management skills. No one – including you – will be able to spoon feed teenagers a high school education. They must decide for themselves to work hard and succeed. One of the best preparations for that challenge is strong self-esteem. Take every opportunity to reassure your child that he or she is loved, accepted, and important in the family.

Remember to stay involved in your child's school. Now is not the time to take a back seat. More than ever, your teenager needs your support and involvement.

Adolescence is a time of rapid growth requiring more calories. Remember to continue good, healthy eating habits during this time. Encourage your teen to eat breakfast every day – it is important for starting the day off right. Skipping meals can lead to overeating at other times during the day.



## Introduce Your Teen to Local Colleges

Your ninth-grader is still years away from major decisions about college and career choices. But, guidance counselors advise, this is not too early for him or her to become aware of the college and university environment and all it offers both those who seek higher academic education and those who want meaningful preparation in a chosen career.

Check out your area for its range of educational experiences. Whether your teen will actually choose a local school or will ultimately go to school elsewhere, there are many advantages to taking him or her onsite to schools near home.

### Check out the campus.

Every school campus has its own unique flavor. Your teen can begin to get a feeling for the higher education experience and for a particular school just by being there.

### Attend a game or two.

Some local colleges have outstanding sports events and stadiums. Is your boy or girl interested in playing or just following a college sport? Attend some games together.

### Visit school museums and art exhibits.

Virtually every college and university has art shows, poetry readings, student photo exhibits and other events which a teen and parent can enjoy.

### Get a cultural calendar.

Many schools have annual events to which the public is invited free, or to which tickets are available. Many schools offer performances by renowned musicians, dance troupes and other cultural leaders.

### Use the college library.

Some colleges and universities will issue library cards to local residents – either free or at a modest annual rate. These libraries have excellent resource materials, from massive online computer research services to extensive book and video collections.

### Check out programs for teens.

Your area colleges and universities may offer programs specifically designed to introduce local youth to the campus and interest them in higher education. Find out what types, for instances, of summer studies for teens might be offered.

## Nurturing Yourself

### Too Often Tired? Try this Fatigue-Fighter

Some days you're just sort of weary. Other days, it builds to near-exhaustion. Suddenly, you find you can't remember when last you felt bright and full of energy. No wonder. Working, parenting, homemaking and being a good community member can take a toll on even the most hardy, fit individuals.

#### Fatigue is a message.

Is it telling you that you're an over-functioner? Doing too much for too many people? Is it trying to let you know you're run down? Possibly ill? If your fatigue has a cause such as these, act in your own best interest to overcome it. Let others help you handle the chores. Get a check-up if you suspect you're ill. Catch up on your sleep. And if your periodic fatigue comes from causes you can't avoid, try this re-energizing routine.

#### Find a quiet place.

It might be the porch swing, your bedroom, or even the bathroom. Give yourself a few minutes of privacy. Close your eyes. Relax your muscles. Breathe deeply. Each time you breathe out, try to become a little more relaxed.

#### Give yourself a suggestion.

Now offer yourself a calming thought. Say it quietly aloud if you wish. "When I go back in the house, I'll feel new energy." Or "I'll go down to the kitchen now and feel calm while I have the children help me prepare dinner." Or give yourself a modest pat on the back: "I'm really a special person – bright, friendly and alert." You may be surprised at how such thoughts take root when you give yourself a minute or two to relax.

#### Avoid talking about your fatigue.

Tell everybody you see, "I'm tired. I feel tired all the time," and you're also sending your mind a message that'll make you even more tired.

#### Surprise! Activity can best a rest.

Amazingly, a brisk walk in the fresh air for five or ten minutes may do more to refresh and energize you than plopping on the couch.

#### Change your position.

If you're fatigued from bending over your desk balancing a checkbook, sit up straight, open your eyes wide, gently rotate your head from shoulder to shoulder. If arms or legs ache, give yourself a brief comforting massage.

Taking the time to give yourself a break from fatigue is healthful for you, as well as for your teen and other family members. You're modeling good self-care – one of the most important lessons a parent can teach children.

## Health Matters

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A Frank Talk

With each passing year of adolescence, parents can become more concerned about their son's or daughter's sexuality. Many may hope that their youngsters will abstain from sex until they are older. A family's religious beliefs and values may convince parents to encourage chastity. At the same time, parents know that more and more teens are engaging in sex, perhaps including some in their teen's peer group.

In the past, teen pregnancy was the main fear associated with early sexuality. Becoming pregnant before a young girl is physically or emotionally prepared to be a mother imposes both medical risks and long-lasting consequences. Today, however, pregnancy is only one of many reasons parents fear for their children's futures, where sexuality is concerned. The epidemic spread of sexually transmitted diseases – STD's – should motivate caring parents to become informed – and inform their children – about sexual behavior and risk of STD's.

AID's is one of the most deadly and fast-spreading of the STD's. In the USA, more than 800,000 people are HIV-positive. What can a parent do?

#### Have a frank talk with your teen.

Make it a one-to-one, parent and teen talk that is less a lecture and more a concerned conversation. Stay informed about the most prevalent types of sexually transmitted diseases. In addition to AID's there are several hundred sexually transmitted diseases, some treatable and some for which there is not yet a treatment.

#### Equip yourself and your teen with resources.

There are excellent books and magazine articles on the topic of STD's. Ask your local librarian for help finding one or more. High school guidance offices and the resource offices of major medical centers may also offer helpful information.

#### Involve your family doctor.

Would your teen benefit from a talk with a pediatrician, family doctor or gynecologist? Ask your doctor. Some physicians suggest that sexually active teens have periodic medical check-ups for STD's.

#### Will you provide facts on contraception?

Some parents think that to provide such facts sends a mixed message. "If we get into the facts about contraception devices, it's as if we're saying it's okay to have sex," some parents say. Medical experts make a case for parents at least seeing that their teens understand the risks of sexual behavior and the options of contraception. Boys and girls alike should understand that both sexes are responsible for contraception.

## Nurturing Your Teen

### Resolving Conflict With Your Teen

Many of us go into the arena of parenting a teen with the best of intentions. We tell ourselves we won't make the mistakes our parents did. We hope – even plan – for our parent-teen relationship to be smooth, sensitive and supportive.

Then the conflict begins. The constant telephone tie-ups. The mood swings. The tests of will. "Everybody's doing it!" "Why do you treat me like a baby?" "Get off my back!" Frustration builds. Anger erupts.

What can you do? The authors of **I'm on Your Side: resolving conflict with your teenage son or daughter**, offer some suggestions. Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott point out that "teenagers are walking time bombs of exploding hormones," and parents "lose their objectivity when their authority is being challenged."

#### Don't build to a blow-up.

Start noticing what lights your fuse. Instead of clamping down on your emotions, become more aware of them. Expressing your emotions is healthy and acceptable. Venting them as a blow-up is not.

#### Understand the rebellion.

The constant questioning of house rules, chores and privileges is part of a teen's effort to establish independence – not a direct assault on your parenthood.

#### Work toward mutual respect.

Humiliating, ridiculing or becoming an all-out dictator invites distance and resistance. Respect, say the authors, "invites closeness and cooperation."

#### Work toward establishing agreements.

Discuss areas of conflict. Even if you can't get all the way to total agreement, you can aim for an acceptable compromise on phone use, parties, dating, appearance and other areas where you disagree.

#### Take time out.

When things escalate to where you or your teen may say things you will regret, suggest a "time out." Good decisions seldom come in the heat of angry words.

And if your teen asks for a spur of the moment decision on something that's too big to act on that quickly, let him or her know it'll take more time for you to think about it. Make sure your youngster understands you're not just putting him or her off and that you are going to think it over.

Controlling your anger and aiming for mutual respect will do more than improve your parent-teen relationship. It will give your youngster a model for handling his or her own anger. It's a lesson that can enhance relationships throughout life.