

How teens can talk to parents about getting help

When teens think they need help with an emotional or mental health issue, they often aren't sure how to tell their parents, or are afraid to bring it up. It's understandable — telling parents that you're facing something that feels really big, like anxiety or depression, can be tough. You might feel embarrassed to say you need help, or you might just worry they won't understand or will be disappointed in you. But it's a parent's job to help you out, and they are almost always more sympathetic, and less judgmental, than you imagine. Here are some tips to make talking about it a little easier.

- **Know that there's nothing wrong with asking for help.** Struggling with mental health is very common. Think of it like asking for help for anything else — like struggling in math class or needing glasses.
- **Bring it up.** Pick a low-key moment. It's easier to talk when everyone is feeling comfortable. You don't want to be competing for your parents' attention with other things or siblings.
- **Explain how you're feeling.** Say what you're having trouble with, and how it's affecting you. For example, "I'm realizing it's really hard for me to participate in class. Even if we're just reading out loud, I'm terrified the teacher will call on me. I get really anxious and I can't concentrate." Or maybe, "I'm not feeling like myself these days. I'm tired all the time, and I don't want to leave the house. I feel sad all the time — I don't feel right."

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- **Say you want help.** Don't get caught up trying to analyze or explain why you might be feeling this way. Just say, "I want to see someone who can help. I want to learn some strategies so I can start feeling better." If they say what you're describing sounds normal — everybody gets nervous or down sometimes — let them know that you're pretty sure this is more serious than that. The way you feel is making you unhappy and keeping you from doing things you want to do.
- **If you need to, try again.** If you feel like your parents brushed you off before, try asking them again. Sometimes it takes parents a little time to get the message. But this time set aside time to talk. Say, "There's something that I want to talk to you about, and it's important. When are you going to be free to talk?" Going to another adult you trust can be helpful, too. An aunt or an uncle can help you talk to your parents about how you're feeling. A trusted adult at school, like a teacher or a school psychologist, is also a good option.
- **Don't wait.** The sooner you ask for help, the sooner you'll start feeling better, so don't put the conversation off. You'll be proud of yourself afterward, and feeling less alone can be a big relief.

More Resources from the Child Mind Institute

- ▶ [How to Talk to Your Parents About Getting Help](#)
- ▶ [How to Support a Friend With Mental Health Challenges](#)
- ▶ [How to Talk About Mental Health Issues](#)
- ▶ [How to Help Yourself Get Organized](#)

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