

Rapid mood changes normal for teens

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Dear Mayo Clinic: My 13-year-old daughter has become very moody, which I realize is normal for this age. But, I'm concerned she may be depressed. What is the difference between typical teen behavior and depression in teenagers? Are there certain things I should watch for that could be signs of depression?

A: Variation in mood is normal. People's moods usually are related to

their thoughts about the events happening around them, along with events in their recent past. Teens' reactions to those events may seem extreme. But, that doesn't necessarily signal an underlying problem, such as depression. However, there are specific symptoms of depression to watch for. If you see signs of depression in your daughter, ask her about them, and, if you are concerned, make an appointment for her to see a [health care provider](#) for an evaluation as soon as possible.

It's not unusual for [teens](#)' moods to shift quickly and for their emotional responses to be strong. That's due, in part, to the developmental changes in brain activity and to the fluctuations in hormones that happen in an adolescent's body. These changes also can contribute to teens having heightened or exaggerated interpretations of what's going on around them. All this can combine to make a teen's emotions seem volatile or unpredictable. Although that can be unsettling to the adults who care about them, for many teens, rapid and intense mood changes are often a normal part of their development.

In some cases, though, emotion and mood can signal depression. If sadness, irritability, anger or other difficult emotions are persistent and do not seem to ease over several weeks, that may be cause for concern. If your daughter cries frequently for no clear reason, if she expresses feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, or if she feels overwhelming guilt or fixates on what she perceives to be past failures, those are all possible symptoms of depression. That's particularly true if the way she's feeling makes it hard for her to do normal daily routines, such as get up on time, go to school or finish homework.

Other symptoms of depression in teens may include loss of interest in activities they usually enjoy, sleep and appetite changes, lack of energy, problems concentrating or making decisions, neglecting their appearance, and use of alcohol or drugs. Some teens who are depressed also may express negative views of themselves and the future. They may

harm themselves or have thoughts of death or suicide.

If you suspect your daughter is dealing with more than the normal ups and downs of being a teen, talk to her. Share with her that you are concerned, and ask how she is feeling. If you believe she may be thinking about suicide, ask her, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" Some parents avoid this question because they fear it might put the idea of suicide in a child's mind when it wasn't there before. That's not the case. Teens know about suicide. If they are thinking about it for themselves, they want someone to ask them about it.

Even if she doesn't want to hurt herself, a teen whose behavior goes beyond the typical mood swings of adolescence needs help. If your daughter has symptoms of depression, take her to see her health care provider or a [mental health professional](#) who can assess her situation and offer guidance. That provider also can help connect you and your daughter with other support services, such as local counseling resources and support groups, if necessary.

For more information about teen [depression](#), go to Mayo Clinic's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/mayoclinic), and watch the four-minute video "Preventing Teen Suicide." The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is also available for teens who may be thinking about hurting themselves: 1-800-273-8255 (toll-free). Details about this important resource are online at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

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