

HELPING TEENS WHO ARE **STRESSED** OR DEPRESSED



PART OF THE CEDAR COLLEGE **HELPING TEENS RESOURCES** AVAILABLE AT WWW.CEDARCOLLEGE.SA.EDU.AU

Many teens struggle with life. They feel stressed about school, they feel rejected by friends, they go through tough life events, they don't feel good about themselves, they get caught up in cycles which hurt themselves and others.

For parents and teachers, it's hard to know what to do at times.

We hope these articles will help provide some ideas about how to support young people through some specific challenges. The Cedar Care team are available to meet with parents, families and students and provide support and counseling.

But in the meantime, here are a few key principles to keep in mind.

Empathy is more important than advice.

We have a great need as humans to be listened to, understood and cared for. We can't move forward until we feel all three of these things. Teenagers are like this. They need to feel like someone cares deeply about their struggles before they can solve them or address them in any way. When we are empathic towards teens, they can move forward. When we are not – they often find life much harder.

Be empathic. Say "I'm sorry you feel so angry right now", "I know life feels really hard, and I wish I could help", "Feeling anxious like that must feel awful", "I wish this hadn't happened for you", "I'm so sorry you are going through this".



Keep asking questions and staying in touch with what is going on.

It is vital to find out what young people are going through, how they are feeling, coping with and what life is like for them. We need to ask them about the details of what they are going through, what they think and believe about the situation, what they are most worried about, what is the hardest to deal with – and so on. **It's not easy find out the details from teens** (they don't always want to share, it's hard to juggle their needs for privacy with our need to know, we're busy and so on). But it's essential.

Why does asking questions matter so much? Here are two reasons:

First, we need this information in order to help them effectively. Without knowing the details about what is happening, we can't give good advice, we don't know what they need, we can't help them avoid future problems, it's harder to keep them safe and we can't be sympathetic in useful ways.

Second, asking questions gives a message that we care about them. When parents and other adults fail to ask about the details, teens often get this message: "I don't care that much". When we do ask questions, the longer term message (although teens might not always hear it accurately right at that time) is this: I care about you, what you are going through and what you think.

Help teens stay socially connected and doing meaningful activities

For human beings, social activity is an essential part of life and well being. Research shows that having regular conversations with others, helping other people, feeling close to others, caring for people, spending leisure time with others – is all connected to wellbeing – physically and emotionally.

For teenagers, this is particularly true. Adolescence is a time when humans start to form stronger relationships outside of their family groups. If for some reason teens get rejected by peers, are excluded or fail to develop strong peer relationships - their risk of emotional and mental health problems increase significantly. Proactively helping young people find, keep and repair friendships is one of parents and carers most important jobs.

Similarly, teens also need to be occupied with meaningful, goal directed activity. They need important things to do. **One of the most effective, evidence based treatments for depression is behavioural activation.** This is a fancy way of saying increasing meaningful activities. Psychologists work with people to get them to identify goals or interests and gradually, step by step, increase the depressed or anxious

person's level of engagement and activity in these things.

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A key role for parents and carers is to work with depressed and stressed teens to make sure their day is scheduled with activities which mean something to them, which are enjoyable and which take them on a path to a life that they care about. As always, this is easier said than done - but it's importance cannot be overstated.

Want more help?

To make an appointment or enquiry with a **Cedar Care staff member please call the High School Office on 7221 3605.**

To make an appointment or inquiry regarding the City Reach Counselling Team, please call the City Reach Office on 8369 1000.