



# Tips to Support your Teen's Mental Health

Authors: Rob Hock, Aidyn Iachini, Patrice Penney, Cheri Shapiro  
College of Social Work, University of South Carolina



For tips on how to talk to your teen about their mental health visit [www.nami.org/your-journey/kids-teens-and-young-adults/kids/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-their-mental-health/](http://www.nami.org/your-journey/kids-teens-and-young-adults/kids/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-their-mental-health/)

## Help your teen to problem-solve

One way to support your teen's mental health is to teach them how to independently solve problems that they may encounter at school. Challenges that teens face can be related to school work or homework assignments, or about relationships with their peers at school. Solving problems independently can help children feel confident and competent. Teaching your teen the key steps to problem-solving, and prompting them through these steps, is a great way to teach a skill that will last a lifetime:



### Responding to concerns about your teen's mental health

As parents, we sometimes worry about how our children are doing. You might notice your teen being more quiet than usual, staying in their room more often, or just looking sad. Everyone gets sad or down at times ... but how do you know if it is something more?

If your teen looks sad or is more upset or sensitive than usual, and at the same time is eating less or sleeping more, these are signs to pay attention to. Check in with your teen and see how they are doing. If feelings of being sad or down persist, and this is getting in the way of your teen enjoying things they usually like to do, this may be a time to seek professional help.

As parents, we are experts on how our children are doing. Children don't always tell us if something is wrong, so be on the lookout for warning signs like not wanting to go to school, doing poorly in school, or changes in their mood or behavior (like sleeping or eating habits).

If you see these signs, checking in with your teen is a great first step to sorting out what may be troubling them. This can also be a time to help coach them to solve a problem or challenge that they are facing.

- STEP 1** Decide what the specific problem is
- STEP 2** Brainstorm solutions
- STEP 3** Pick the best solution(s) and try it out
- STEP 4** Check in to see if the solution worked
- STEP 5** Refine the solution...if needed!

## Responding to your teen's anxieties

Fears and worries are a normal part of growing up, and most children feel worried or fearful at times. So how do you know if this is something to pay attention to?

If your teen seems anxious and avoidant because they are worried, like not wanting to go to school, the first step is to speak with them.

Using open-ended questions like "How are you doing?" or "I notice you seem worried...what are you worried about?" gives your teen a chance to let you know what is happening. Talking to your teen about how you cope with feelings of worry or anxiety can be helpful.

Ideas that you can share to help your teen cope with worries or anxiety include taking a few deep, slow breaths, or writing down some positive or helpful things they can say to themselves when they get worried, like "It's going to be ok" or "I can do this" can be helpful. It is important for teens to learn skills to cope with feelings of anxiety on their own, because we are not always there to help. If your teen continues to have feelings of anxiety that are getting in the way of doing things like visiting with friends or going to school, consider seeking professional help.