

Recognize the Signs of Teenage Depression



Adolescence is a time of joys and possibilities, but it's also a time of changes, challenges and magnified pains. REM lead singer Michael Stipe wrote the angst-ridden song "Everybody Hurts" with teenagers in mind.

Statistics show just how much today's kids are hurting inside. After years of steady decline, America's teen suicide rate has started climbing again. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among teenagers, and for every suicide death there are an estimated 10 attempts.

Christian teenagers aren't immune from depression and despair. Many of them face the added burden of guilt for feeling worthless and unlovable. So they may be too ashamed to admit that they're struggling emotionally.

The most important thing parents can do for hurting teenagers is just be there. Be available and willing to listen, even if you can't solve kids' problems for them. Acknowledge that your teenagers are in pain; don't cheapen their problems by

saying, "I know just how you feel." And if the problems are severe or profound, don't ignore them. Seek professional help through your teenagers' school or your community.

Use this issue of "The Parent Link" to learn more about kids who are hurting. Then discover ways to connect with them and share the good news that God knows our hearts and offers comfort and healing.

Here are some general warning signs of teenage depression. If you notice any of these things, talk to your teenager and seek help:

- A suddenly worsening school performance
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Sadness, hopelessness, anger or rage
- An unexplained decline in enthusiasm or energy
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Unprovoked episodes of crying or overreaction to criticism
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Sudden neglect of appearance or hygiene
- Use of alcohol or other drugs
- Talking or writing about suicide or death
- Giving away prized possessions

(Suicide Prevention Resource Center, www.sprc.org)



Statistics about depression and suicide can seem daunting, but help is available:

- About 20% of teenagers experience depression before they reach adulthood.
- Girls attempt suicide more often than boys, but boys are four times as likely to succeed because they use deadlier methods.
- Researchers have identified "protective factors" against teen suicide: learned skills in problem-solving, impulse control, and conflict resolution; family and community support; access to mental-health care and support for help-seeking; restricted access to highly lethal items; and cultural and religious beliefs that support self-preservation.
- Suicide-prevention resources: 1-800-273-TALK (8255), 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433), www.teensuicide.us, www.teenhelp.com



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Help kids express their feelings by asking these heart-to-heart questions:

1. If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be, and why?
2. What are some challenges you're dealing with now? Do any seem overwhelming?
3. What gives you the most joy? What causes you the most pain and frustration?
4. How do you deal with hurts and disappointments? Do you ever think about hurting yourself? Do you have someone you feel comfortable talking to?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will protect your teenagers from depression and negative thoughts and feelings.
2. Your teenagers will feel loved and valued by God and you.
3. Your teenagers will deal with struggles in constructive ways.
4. Your teenagers "will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand" (Philippians 4:7).

Verse of the Month

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus doesn't promise us a trouble-free life. Instead, he came to earth to experience pain firsthand and then conquer it. He knows what each of us is going through and promises that everything, even the struggles, will work out for good. Because Jesus overcame sin and death, we have the hope of new life in heaven, our pain-free eternal home.

What's Up With Kids

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, Megan Hutchinson describes how she, Doug Fields, and John Baker developed a biblically based program for teenagers. "Life Hurts, G.O.D. H.E.A.L.S." offers lifelong tools for dealing with unresolved hurt and pain. The eight steps are based on Jesus' Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10.

1. Get help. I admit that I am powerless on my own and that I need help.
2. Open your heart. I now know that God exists, that I matter to him, and that he is the only One who has the power to heal my pain.
3. Depend on Christ. I realize I need to turn my life over to Christ. I need to depend on him in all areas of my life, including all that I say, think, and do.
4. Hear and speak. I agree to evaluate my life and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone that I trust.
5. Embrace God's way. I will stop doing things my way and put my life on the path that leads toward God's way.
6. Ask for forgiveness. I will offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, and I will ask for forgiveness for any wrong I've done to others.
7. Live for God. I will set aside some time for God each day to examine my life, read my Bible, and pray so that I have the power to live God's way.
8. Share with others. By my words and actions, I will share with people in need the message that God heals.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Ludacris, born Christopher Bridges, studied music management at Georgia State University. He's a three-time Grammy-winning rapper and actor. Ludacris is the highest-selling Southern hip-hop artist of all time and has had four Billboard Hot 100 singles. He also has appeared in numerous TV shows and movies.

Albums: *Theater of the Mind* (2008), *Release Therapy* (2006), *The Red Light District* (2004), *Chicken-n-Beer* (2003), *Word of Mouf* (2001), *Back for the First Time* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: Ludacris is known for his versatile, opinionated lyrics and rapid-fire delivery. His albums contain parental advisories because they're full of foul language, derogatory references to women, and much sexual content.

What Ludacris Says About Success: "At the end of the day, you either have the talent or you don't, and you either take it seriously or you don't." He adds, "It's like my job is my vacation."

Discussion Questions: What talents and gifts has God given you? What steps are you taking right now to improve those talents? Have you ever wasted one of God's gifts? If so, explain. What type of job would be best for your talents?

Christian Artist

Background: After realizing he'd lived a sinful lifestyle, Lecrae became a Christian at age 19 and began ministering to others. Lecrae now raps, speaks, and volunteers in juvenile detention centers. He co-founded ReachLife Ministries and has a heart for reforming urban culture for Christ. Lecrae has received two GMA Dove Award nominations.

Albums: *Rebel* (2008), *After the Music Stops* (2006), *Real Talk* (2005)

What Parents Should Know: Lecrae says he wants "to digest theology and spit it back out so the streets can digest it." His lyrics are transparent, relatable, and deeply impacting. Lecrae's musical style is Christian hip-hop/rap and crunk (a hip-hop genre that focuses on beats rather than lyrics).

What Lecrae Says: "I really hope we can stir people toward going against the sinful stream of ideals, values, and lifestyles.... The fall of humanity has not thwarted God's intention for us. But...we need to renew our mind."

Discussion Questions: How hard is it for you to resist your sinful nature and society's evil influences? What intentions or plans do you think God has for you? Read Romans 12:2. What are some ways you can renew your mind each day?

FILMWATCH

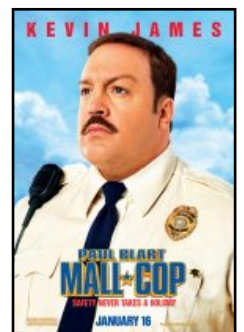
Movie: *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* (releases Jan. 16)

Genre: Comedy

Rating: PG for some violence, mild crude and suggestive humor, and language

Synopsis: Paul Blart (Kevin James) is a single dad trying to make ends meet as a security officer in a New Jersey mall. Although the easygoing Blart is constantly ridiculed for his job, he takes it very seriously. When a gang of Santa's helpers takes over the mall and kidnaps hostages (including Blart's daughter and girlfriend), Blart goes on a mission to prove that he can save the day.

Discussion Questions: Do people ever take you less seriously because of your age, appearance, or interests? If so, how do you respond? How firm are your convictions? Are they firm enough to withstand ridicule? Have you ever gone on a "mission"? If so, what did you try to prove to others or to yourself?



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