

When should I be concerned about my child or student?

First, how are YOU going?

As a parent or teacher of a teenager, the best sign you may need help is when you feel stressed or overwhelmed! Parents (and teachers) often think that they should struggle on by themselves until they figure it out, or get it "right." An exhausted, or demoralised parent or teacher, by definition, is a person who is unlikely to be functioning at their best... nor be ready to take on the often exceptional challenge adolescents can throw at even the most committed and skilled parent or teacher.

How do they look?

If you're feeling on top of the challenges, but have concerns that your teenage child or student may need professional help, a few of the following may be worth talking to a psychologist about:

- If your child or student shows **signs of on-going distress** or **poor coping**, including **withdrawal, denial** of obvious problems or the impact thereof,
- If your child or student **does not "return to normal"** from a set back or loss such as change of school, lost friendship or change to family relationships, etc.,
- If your child or student becomes **overly influenced by a negative peer group**, and appears to lack the skills to manage the situation positively,
- If your child or student unexpectedly starts **doing things that are very out of character** for them, i.e. becomes especially secretive, or obsessed about interests at the expense of other things,
- If your child or student **functions far less well** than usual in performing tasks in their school, work, friendship or home routines,
- If **teachers or their friends express concern** about your child or student. If your child or student directly or indirectly communicates they are not coping, or expresses the need for help.

Why do teenagers have mental health problems?

Adolescence is a peak period for the development of mental health problems. Unfortunately, the factors at play are complex and not well understood. Because adolescence is such a formative stage, there is a high risk that problems at this time persist into adulthood. **Biological changes** (brain development, hormonal fluctuations, etc.) set the scene for an **increased vulnerability to stress** from the environment. Developmental tasks of adolescence include successfully negotiating many social and psychological challenges. For many teenagers, **traumatic or stressful events** such as extreme family conflict or breakdown can overwhelm their capacity to cope. This can lead to the development of a range of psychological or behavioural problems. Parental support and good parent "team work" is critical during these times is critical for recovery (contact Neo for free tips for parents).

What sort of help can Psychologists provide?

Following a psychological assessment, Psychologists can provide effective and evidence-based interventions that best address the issue. These range from one-to-one **counselling, family therapy, group therapy** or **secondary consultation**. For instance, **talking based approaches** can increase self-understanding, help to find meaning, facilitate emotional relief, teach practical coping strategies, improve social or parenting skills, or solve interpersonal problems, or deal effectively with crises. Sometimes simply obtaining **education** on an issue can be all that is needed. Also, **consulting** to parents or teachers can be a very effective way of helping an individual. Anyone can refer themselves to a Psychologist – however, referral from a Medical Practitioner is required for Medicare rebates.

Like to know more? Call and speak to a Psychologist at:
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www.neopsychology.com.au

If you would like to **receive more advice sheets** in this series, please contact us at Neo Psychology