

When Is It More Than Teen Angst?

Adolescence is a challenging time for teens and their parents.

For parents, it can feel like suddenly, your sweet, cooperative child has become moody, defiant, and short-tempered!

How can you tell what is 'normal' teenage behaviour and what is cause for concern?

Use the following table as a starting point.



Normal Teen Behaviours	Cause for Concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moody, argumentative, rebellious • Resisting instructions and requests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent feelings of sadness, worry, or anger that last more than a few days • Feeling hopeless or that life has no purpose • Frequent violent outbursts in which others get hurt or property gets destroyed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing appearance: changing style, cutting or dying hair, wearing provocative clothing. • "Trying on" different identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently neglecting personal hygiene • Changing appearance along with other changes such as significant weight loss or gain and self-harm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawing from parents • Being embarrassed by parents • Increasingly reliant on peers • Increased need for privacy and secrecy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending a lot of time alone, disconnected from peers and social activities <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending time with a much older peer group, or peers who encourage negative behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance to get up early for school • increasing resistance to attending school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant decrease in school attendance and/or academic performance • Physical symptoms (stomach aches, headaches, backaches)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased concentration • Needs prompts to remember to complete tasks • Easily distracted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to concentrate to the point that schoolwork and daily functioning are impacted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needing more sleep • Developing a larger appetite during growth spurts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing sleep patterns: sleeping abnormally long or not sleeping • Significant changes in appetite: consistent overeating or undereating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some light risk-taking or experimenting with sex, alcohol, drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risky and/or delinquent behaviour • Disregard for rules, laws, and parents' concerns • Self-harming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worrying about physical appearance and trying to fit in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden and significant changes in eating behaviours and/or over-exercising


When You Are Concerned About Your Teen

Start with your teen ...

- Invite your teen to share what is on their mind
- Listen (really listen) and try to understand what is going on from their point of view
- Try to keep your own emotional reaction in check; your teen may not share if they feel like you will become angry, scared, sad, or upset
- Give them space ... but pay attention

Crisis lines give your teen 24/7 access to a safe and non-judgmental ear

 **ROCK Crisis Line**
905-878-9785

 **Kids Help Phone**
1-800-668-6868

 **Distress Centre Halton**
www.dchaltont.ca

Trust your instincts. You know your child best. If you feel like there is something to be concerned about, it is important to get some help. Your family doctor or a community agency is a good place to start.



Your Family Doctor

Your family doctor can assess your child and may be able to provide treatment. Your doctor may refer your child to a psychiatrist for more intensive treatment. Some doctors are part of a Family Health Team, which may include a psychologist or social worker.



Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK)

ROCK is a non-profit agency that provides mental health services for children, youth, and families. These services can be accessed through ROCK's [walk-in clinics](#).

Preparing for your appointment

- ☒ Make a list of your concerns. It is helpful to be as specific as you can. For example, instead of "My child is very tired," try "My child sleeps for at least 12 hours every night and struggles to get out of bed in the morning."
- ☒ You may find it helpful to write a letter describing the problem as clearly as you can and give it to your doctor at the first appointment. Useful information to include:
 - How long the problem has been going on
 - Do the symptoms change in different situations?
 - Other health concerns your child has
 - Medication (prescribed and over-the-counter)
 - Family history
- ☒ Keep in mind that it can take some time to make a mental health diagnosis. Once a diagnosis is made, treatment can also take some time.