

Tips for Teens with Depression Who Are Transitioning to Young Adulthood

 web.archive.org/web/20160711163130/http://mentalhealthtreatment.net/tips-for-teens-with-depression



Teens with depression have already overcome a number of obstacles that others don't experience. The process of transitioning to young adulthood presents new challenges, but knowing what they are can help someone set appropriate expectations. What can young people with depression and parents do to help make the transition to young adulthood go as smoothly as possible?

Depression's Challenges and Tips for Overcoming Them

Feeling lonely. Perhaps the biggest challenge when a depressed young adult gets out on his own is dealing with loneliness. Some people attempt to smother that feeling of being alone by engaging in risky behaviors like taking drugs or drinking excessively, says Lisa Aronson, MSW, PhD, a clinical child psychologist and adjunct faculty at Antioch University in Santa Barbara, California. "They run from feeling lonely by using high-risk behaviors and high-risk experiences," she says.

Tyler Hensel, a 22-year-old who has dealt with depression since he was 15, agrees that feeling alone is the hardest aspect of making the transition to young adulthood. “It’s horrible to feel unloved and worthless.”

Tip: The important thing to remember is that your feelings are not reality— you are *not* unloved or worthless. Investing in quality relationships and learning to be OK by yourself are both important parts of growing up.

Friendships. When you become more independent and move on to college or the workplace, making new friends and keeping up with the healthy relationships you already have is important. Depression “decreases your ability to sustain healthy social relationships, so it’s hard to make new friends. It’s a time in life when you’re really reaching out to others and need those social relationships in your life, but if you’re depressed, you don’t have the energy or the confidence to do those things, and so you become more lonely, which increases your depression. It’s like a cyclical pattern,” says Cindy Nichols Anderson, PhD, and owner of Hope Springs Behavioral Consultants in Iowa City, Iowa.

Tip: Recognizing this tiredness is part of setting reasonable expectations for yourself. Start small, give yourself space and celebrate the little wins.

Decision making. Being depressed can also affect the decisions a young person makes about her future, says Nichols Anderson. “If you’re struggling with depression, that can be a very daunting task,” she explains. Depression can affect anything from which colleges or universities are applied to, to test scores needed for success, to independence and organization. “I do have many problems with making decisions, especially when more than one person is involved,” agrees Hensel.

Tip: Understand that making important decisions may take longer for you, but that doesn’t mean that you don’t have the capability and confidence to make good choices.

Being independent. Establishing routines and living independently may also be more difficult while one is coping with depression, whether the young adult is working or going to college, says Nichols Anderson. “Driving or learning how to pay bills or learning how to establish routines in their lives independently of someone telling them what to do is much more difficult and takes more energy and more concentration (for a depressed person),” she says. “That means they may end up either accepting a job or taking college classes that they may not be as interested in or making friends that aren’t as healthy for them.”

“I like being independent, but I also really like other people making the decisions,” says Hensel. “Just having a support [person]—my fiancée—is so beneficial.”

Tip: It can help to give yourself some space and take time to evaluate your work and relationships. It can also help to have the advice and support of people you rely on.

Ground Rules for Dealing with Depression

Set small and realistic expectations. “If your expectations are too high for yourself, then you’re going to feel like the depression is getting worse,” Nichols Anderson says. For instance, if you’re applying for colleges, make a goal to apply to one or two colleges to begin with and then maybe in another week or month, apply for a couple more, she suggests. “Don’t tell yourself, ‘I’m going to get all fifteen of these applications done!’ because that would be too hard.”

“I’m bad with setting goals, but it would probably be good for me to do,” Hensel says. “I can see where small goals would be good for showing importance and achievement.”

Parents: Think in a multi-dimensional way. College may not be the best next step. “There are vocational schools and community colleges that offer excellent vocational opportunities,” says Aronson. “Your child may benefit more from taking a few classes at the community college and living at home or going to work with a parent. Any way to get the child to recognize that they have valuable contributions to make and raise the child’s esteem and allow them to develop real capacity.” Alternatively, maybe your young adult needs an extra year at home to work toward independence with certain skills, such as driving, grocery shopping and cooking.

Get outside and move around. Both Hensel and Nichols Anderson find exercising to be helpful in the battle with depression. “Even if it’s playing with a pet or going for a short walk, just some movement once or twice a day is really very helpful,” Nichols Anderson says.

“It can be hard to get up and actually go, but I always feel better afterward,” says Hensel.

Be socially proactive. Spend time with a good friend or family member, even if you don’t feel like it. “Even though online relationships can be really helpful and under some circumstances are supportive, it’s also good to have some in-person relationships too,” Nichols Anderson says. “If someone asks you to go somewhere and your depression is telling you no, you’re tired, try to come up with the energy to do it at least once a week. Once you do it, you’ll feel a little bit better.”

Consider a pet. Aronson says that having a pet can be a great way to have companionship, and it will give you a sense of responsibility, too.

“It’s important to have a sense of responsibility and usefulness,” says Hensel.

Keep a gratitude journal. A simple notebook or any one of a number of apps can capture three things each day that you found OK. Jot down something as small as, *I heard my favorite song on the radio today or the weather was nice.* “It can be really simple,” Nichols Anderson says. “What we know is that people who are grateful for life tend to have an improved

mood, they exercise more and they sleep better.” Since depression tends to cause a focus on the negative, training the brain to look at the positive aspects of life instead can really improve life quality.

“Another reason that a gratitude journal really helps is that when you have a bad day, you can go back and look at it. Sometimes it helps to remember that there are some good things in the world and in life, even if you’re writing the same thing every day,” says Nichols Anderson.

Find support. “It’s important to find a support, whether it’s a parent, friend or partner, and hold onto them tight. Be open and honest. It will be okay, even when it feels like the end of the world,” Hensel says. “Having that support [person] to talk to is invaluable. My parents were very supportive, and I gained many friends that helped, too. I’ve always had an open communication with my parents when it comes to depression. They listen and do everything they can to help. I don’t think I would’ve made it without them.”

Understand that depression does not define you. “I think a lot of people think, ‘I HAVE depression,’ or ‘I AM depressed,’ or ‘This is who I am,’ and it almost becomes their identity,” says Nichols Anderson. “This is a symptom; this is not who you are.”

“Work on self-confidence and remind yourself that you are worth it. You are valuable,” says Hensel. “It was a little scary at first trying to find friends and trying to be open with them about it, but I’ve come to realize the stigmas around mental illnesses like depression and would love to rid the world of them. The more open I am, the more I feel I can help people understand (depression) and that it’s not that big of a deal. We’re just like everyone else, we just think a little differently.”

Sources:

Dr. Lisa Aronson, MSW, PhD, adjunct faculty at Antioch University, Santa Barbara, CA

Dr. Cindy Nichols Anderson, PhD, owner of Hope Springs Behavior Consultants, Iowa City, IA

Tyler Hensel, Fargo, ND

Written by Sarah E. Ludwig