



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations
with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

TEENS AND MENTAL HEALTH

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The APA states that we are in the midst of a “mental health crisis,” beginning approximately a decade before the pandemic. Children and teens may begin to feel that some of the “normal” but uncomfortable emotions of their preteen and teenage years should not be felt, and they seek to self medicate or self diagnose.



WORLD



What is Happening?

- As children have constant connection at their fingertips, they often find themselves without a place to process all they are seeing, hearing, and experiencing. Students are no longer hearing about a war halfway around the world on the evening news in the living room with their family, they are seeing an Instagram Live of a home in a town torn apart by war as they scroll on their phone alone in their room. A painful argument with a friend at school no longer ends at 2:30 when the bell rings for the day. It continues behind the screen at home.
- The teenage years provide a necessary and healthy season of learning critical life skills. Interpersonal and relational skills are worked on as students navigate friendships. Throughout the teenage years, students often learn how to sit with feelings of anxiety, or how to practice discernment.
- Instead of working with a counselor or trusted adult to talk through the emotions they are feeling, teenagers now come to that individual with a *self-diagnosis*, “I have anxiety”. When the normal process of walking through an uncomfortable experience is labeled with a diagnosis that may require treatment (i.e. anxiety), they may miss the opportunity to lean into the difficult work of some emotional growing pains that are part of being a teenager.



WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

When feeling stressed, worried or broken, find comfort in and lean on the words found in 1 Peter 5:7:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

God's Word reminds us time and time again that we are each His creation. We are not simply tolerated by God, we are deeply cared for by our Creator.

We read in the Psalms that God knows us. He knows, "when I sit down and when I rise up; [He] discern[s] my thoughts from afar" (Psalm 139:2). Not only are we deeply cared for by God, but we are also known. We have a God that is fully aware of the situations causing our son or daughter to wrestle with mental health issues. We can remind our children that their Creator is a God that knows them and cares for them.

For further reflection:

American Psychological Association: "Kids' mental health is in crisis. Here's what psychologists are doing to help", <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health>

Mental Health America: State of Mental Health in America 2024, <https://mhanational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-State-of-Mental-Health-in-America-Report.pdf>

Destinations for Teens: Statistics about substance abuse linked to depression, <https://www.destinationsforteens.com/destinations-blog/can-substance-abuse-cause-depression>

Mayo Clinic: Teen Depression - Signs and Symptoms, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/teen-depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20350985>

Monitoring the Future: An ongoing study of behavior, attitudes, and values of Americans from adolescence through adulthood, <https://monitoringthefuture.org/>





WALK

Conversation Starters and Questions:

If you suspect your pre-teen or teen is struggling with a mental health issue, help them find a trusted, competent, trained and experienced Christian counselor. In the midst of a crisis, the Suicide and Crisis Hotline can be reached by calling 988.

- Familiarize yourself with the symptoms and signs of a student struggling with mental health. Many online resources can help with this, including some in the “For Further Reflection” section on the previous page.
- Talk with your child and know what is happening in their world. Try some parallel conversation - go for a walk or a drive together, as conversation sometimes comes easier when you are side by side.

Parents/Guardians... here’s a question to consider asking yourself as you prepare to have a conversation with your son or daughter about this topic:

Do I process difficult emotions in a healthy way?

Some questions to spark conversations with your children:

- Can you think of a recent time you felt stressed or anxious? Do you feel comfortable sharing the details of that situation with me?
- Do you feel that feelings of stress or anxiety are “bad” and should be hidden or numbed?
- When you experience stress or anxiety, how do you tend to handle these emotions? Do you seek out someone to talk to? Do you pray? Is there the temptation to mask these emotions with substances that may “numb” you to some of these feelings?
- When you think about God’s character, what comes to mind when you experience anxiety? Are you familiar with what scripture says about God’s love, care, and compassion towards you?
- What are some practical ways that I can help remind you in stressful seasons that God loves and cares for you?

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)



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