

school-based youth health nurse



YOUR TEENAGER AND MENTAL HEALTH

A teenage mental health assessment is when a health professional tries to understand how your child's mental health is affecting his/her quality of life. If you think your child has mental health issues, assessment is one step towards getting help and treatment if needed.

What is a teenage mental health assessment?

'Assessment' is just another word for an **appointment, consultation or interview** – or series of appointments – with a health professional such as a doctor, psychologist or counsellor.

A teenage mental health assessment is about your child and the health professional developing a good relationship, and the professional getting a good understanding of how your child sees the world and the problems he's having.

Why your child might need a teenage mental health assessment

It's not always easy to tell the difference between normal teenage worry or moodiness and more serious mental health issues.

Most normal teenage irritability, arguing and moodiness come and go quickly. But when they persist for 2-3 weeks or are very intense for even shorter periods, it can be a sign that it's more than just worry or feeling down.

If **your child doesn't want to see friends**, or is spending most of the time by herself, it's a sign that you need to take action.

Also if your child stops doing things he usually enjoys, isn't doing so well at school or is taking more risks than usual, this could be a sign that he's feeling very anxious, depressed or stressed and might be helped by having a mental health assessment.

The **best place to start is your GP**, who will either be able to help you directly or refer your child to another professional.

Seeing your child alone

The professional will usually want to speak with your child alone, for all or part of the mental health assessment.

Being alone with the professional can help your child talk openly about his worries. If you're there, he might feel embarrassed about speaking openly, or might not want to talk about sensitive or private issues.

Teenage mental health issues

A teenage mental health assessment will start with the least sensitive issues – for example, home, school, interests and friendships. Then it will move on to more sensitive areas, such as sexuality and drug use. It will also cover more serious mental health issues like anxiety, depression and self-harm.

After a teenage mental health assessment

At the end of a teenage mental health assessment, **the professional will give you an opinion about what the issues and problems are** and suggest a treatment plan. The professional will also say if your child has an emergency that needs immediate action.

Although you might want to know what has happened and what was said at the mental health assessment, your child might need some time before he talks about things with you. He might decide not to share what happens at his mental health appointments. This can be hard, but it's your child's right.

Children 12 years and older

From the age of 12 years, children think more deeply about things and begin to question authority. Your child makes up his own mind about issues.

At 12-15 years, he/she can understand consequences better, thinks about right and wrong, starts to develop his/her own identity and thinks about what he/she wants from life. He/she thinks about other people's points of view, but is still strongly influenced by peers.

So when you talk about the appointment, you could:

- reassure your child that there's nothing wrong with visiting a mental health professional
- talk about what he can expect to get out of going
- talk about confidentiality and privacy
- visit websites together to read other young people's stories – try Reach Out <http://au.reachout.com/> and Headspace <http://headspace.org.au/about-us/>
- talk or give him information about different kinds of services – such as counselling, seeing a psychologist or going to his GP – and explain briefly what the different health professionals do
- let him know that you'll go by yourself even if he doesn't want to, because you think it's important for your family to get some help
- tell him you're happy to go with him and that you'll also respect his privacy.

If you approach teenage mental health issues with kindness, openness, hopefulness, tolerance, confidentiality and encouragement, it helps your child to accept help.

REFERENCE

Read this article in full at the link below

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teenage_mental_health_assessment.html

You or your child may also choose to discuss concerns about mental health with the guidance officer or youth health nurse.

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