

Advice for Kids and Teenagers – How to Get Help About a Mental Health Concern

Source: <http://www.schizophrenia.com>

Lots of pre-teens and teenagers are understandably afraid to tell anyone, even their parents or best friends, about odd or scary things they've been experiencing. For that matter, a lot of adults are afraid to tell anyone also. You'll find that while some people won't understand, many more people will be supportive and helpful to you. Having a psychiatric illness is just like having diabetes - something has gone wrong in your body that you have no control over, and you need to find out what it is so you can get treatment and help yourself feel better. No one tells people with diabetes that they're to blame for their illness, or that they're weak for taking insulin every day. There is no way to know what is causing your symptoms until you see a doctor – but making that appointment is the first step to getting helpful treatment. By getting yourself treatment, you are taking responsibility for your own health like any mature adult.

Believe it or not, parents are pretty observant about their kids. That's their job. They've probably already noticed that something's been on your mind or been bothering you lately. Don't be afraid to answer honestly when they ask how you're doing. Tell them that you're experiencing some symptoms, and you need a doctor's help to figure out what's going on and how you can deal with the situation. There is no reason to think that the symptoms will just go away if you ignore them, and every reason to think that they will continue to get worse. Be serious and insistent - if you take yourself and your health seriously, your parents will too. If you can't find the words to tell them, try looking for information in books (see <http://www.schizophrenia.com/media/> for a list of helpful reference books), or personal stories on the internet that sound like what you're going through. Share what you find with your parents to help them understand.

If you absolutely can't tell your family, find someone else that you trust - a school counselor or nurse, a clergy member, a friend or a friend's parent. Ask them to help you make a doctor's appointment. If all else fails, try getting advice from a helpline or support organization. In the U.S., you can call NAMI's Information and Referral line at 1-800-950-NAMI, describe your symptoms and feelings, and get advice on what to do next. In the U.K., try looking up the Rethink hotline (<http://www.rethink.org>); in Australia, look up the SANE hotline (<http://www.sane.org>)

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