

Does My Teen Need Help?

Physical Warning Signs:

- ▶ Cuts on arms or legs or other physical signs of self-harm
- ▶ Rapid or major weight loss or weight gain
- ▶ Physical injuries without good explanations
- ▶ Many stomach, head, and/or back aches
- ▶ Worsening of a chronic condition

Behavioral or Emotional Warning Signs:

- ▶ Major change in eating and/or sleeping habits
- ▶ Signs of frustration, stress, or anger
- ▶ Unusual or increasing fear, anxiety, or worry
- ▶ Relationship difficulties with family, friends, classmates, or teachers
- ▶ Skipping school, not participating in class, and/or a drop in grades
- ▶ Changes or problems with energy level or concentration
- ▶ Sudden mood swings
- ▶ Feeling down, hopeless, worthless, or guilty
- ▶ Aggressive or violent behavior
- ▶ Sudden loss of self confidence or sense of security
- ▶ Risky behaviors, breaking laws, stealing, hurting people
- ▶ Signs of alcohol or drug use
- ▶ Losing interest in things that were once enjoyed
- ▶ Constant concern about physical appearance or decrease in personal hygiene
- ▶ Isolation from others and often spends time alone
- ▶ Secretive about activities and whereabouts

If you notice any of the above warning signs, talk with your teen and then call your teen's health care provider. Be ready to discuss how serious the problem is, when the problem started, and any changes in your teen's school or family situation. Don't wait too long before seeking help.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TEEN

- When and why did this problem start?
- How much is this problem troubling you?
- Is the problem getting in the way of your school work or relationships with friends or family members?
- Have you been having any thoughts about dying or hurting yourself?
- How can I help you?

Don't be afraid to ask your teen what's going on in his/her life. It will not cause any harm. A teenager in trouble needs support from caring parents.

MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

- ▶ Losing touch with reality
- ▶ In great danger of harming him/herself
- ▶ In great danger of harming others

If your teen is having an emergency, take her/him to the nearest hospital emergency room or call 911.

***DO NOT** leave her/him alone or unattended. Remove all dangerous items (guns, knives, pills) from your teen's reach.*

Do you have any comments or questions about this handout? Please contact Adolescent Health Working Group by emailing feedback@ahwg.net or calling (415) 554-8429. Thank you.

Sources:

- 1) Goodman RF. Choosing a Mental Health Professional for Your Child. New York University Child Study Center. 2000, <http://www.aboutourkids.org>
- 2) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Mental Health Information Center. Child and Adolescent Mental Health. 2003, <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/CA-0004/default.asp>