

- Increase or decrease in weight / change in appetite
- Increase or decrease in sleep
- Feeling tired or lacking energy
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions, slowing down of thought

- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide, self-harm
- Unexplained physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches etc.
- Frequent absenteeism from school
- Irritability and tantrums

What should be highlighted is these symptoms cause disruptions in the teenager's functioning at school, home, in social settings or in any other areas of their life.

But why is Depression occurring in our teenagers? One aspect of it is biological understanding of Depression that there are lower levels of neurotransmitters like serotonin which are required to regulate mood. Adverse or stressful life circumstances also play a part where teenagers exposed to abuse, violence & conflict, bullying, social isolation, educational setbacks, stress at school/ home are more at risk of experiencing Depression. A growing trend of 'perfection' as the accepted norm is also harmful. Teenagers today are expected to meet all the checkboxes of being 'the perfect child' – whether this is getting good grades, participating in extracurricular activities, thriving in sports, being popular or accepted amongst peers, topped with the expectation of getting into a great college.

With increased pressure related to being all-rounders, feelings of unworthiness and guilt can increase and teenagers are more at risk of developing mental health problems.

While there are varied social, economic, biological, and psychological factors that are linked to depression, the pressing need for providing access to psychological or psychiatric help for Depression cannot be denied. The National Mental Health Survey (NMHS 2015-16) provides data that the prevalence rate of Depression is 0.8% (CI 0.3 – 1.4) of teenagers between the ages of 13 – 17 years in India. Early identification and introduction of interventions can help in better prognosis and treatment. It is time that this invisible illness is recognized and teenagers suffering from it are given the help they need.

**- By Tejaswi Shetty, Psychologist, Narayana Health – SRCC Children's Hospital.**