

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR TEENAGER'S MENTAL HEALTH

It's not easy being a teenager. They're under pressure to fit in with their peers, do well in school, get along with their families, and make decisions about their future. At the same time, parenting a teen can be challenging and frustrating because they tend to test limits and crave freedom and independence. They're also more likely to take risks, act out of emotion, and behave impulsively. One reason for this is because the frontal cortex of the brain, which controls reasoning, is not fully developed until about age 25.

Even though the teenager may be pulling away from the family, it's important to show interest in their life and listen when they want to talk. Also, let them know how you feel about experimentation with alcohol and drugs. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have talked with them often about their expectations and have set clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.

What's normal teenage behavior and what isn't? Mental illness is not uncommon in teenagers, and it is a time in life when many mental health disorders first appear, such as depression, anxiety, and ADHD.

These are signs that your teenager may have a mental health issue or substance use disorder:

- Absences from school and failing grades.
- Often feels very worried, sad, or anxious.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- Risky and dangerous behavior.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.
- Drug/alcohol abuse.
- Sleep or appetite disturbances.
- Inability to focus; extreme mood swings.
- Often feels very angry and irritable.
- Trouble with the law: arrests, stealing, violent behavior.
- Running away from home.

Talk to your teen about any behaviors that concern you. If your teen gets defensive and talking is unproductive, contact a professional. Resources for help include EAP or other mental health resources, or your child's healthcare provider.

