





## HOW PARENTS CAN BEST **support** A CHILD AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

It certainly can feel unsettling to any parent when he or she realizes that their child is ready to leave the comfortable confines of elementary, middle, and high school and face the world as a grown-up. Whether that grown-up life involves college, the military, or the workplace, your child is going to have to be independent in many ways - including their approach to caring for their own mental health.

As a participant in the SOS® Signs of Suicide Second ACT Program, your child has learned to recognize the signs of depression and suicide in themselves and their friends and how to ACT as a result. They have learned that to ACT means:



**Acknowledge**  
**Care**  
**Treatment**

# DEPRESSION

VS.

# MOODINESS

No one likes to see their children unhappy, but we know that life cannot always be perfect, and that facing setbacks and struggling with bad days is part of the normal human condition. A teenager who is getting ready to graduate from high school is leaving the highly structured world of his or her childhood and embarking on life as a grown-up. That can be exhilarating -- but scary -- and you may notice your child experiencing some mood changes. What is normal moodiness and trepidation about moving on and what is depression?

Fortunately, there are some differences to look for when trying to determine whether your child is struggling with the regular ups and downs of anticipating a transition or something more.

**Below are three common depression symptoms to consider.**

**Withdrawal.** A teenager who goes in his or her room and barely talks to anyone one day may be having a tough time, but when the **withdrawal, along with other symptoms**, last for two weeks or more, it may be depression.

**Distraction.** The last years of high school certainly provide a lot of reasons for distraction. However, if you notice that your child has a **difficult time concentrating and focusing on activities that don't typically require that much focus**, it may be depression.

**Down Mood.** Many of us have witnessed the cranky teenager who snaps at every question and seems to be miserable. That can be quite typical and not cause for alarm. However, **when that mood lasts for a few weeks, and is accompanied by other changes**, it can signify an adolescent may have depression.

**Other symptoms of depression include:**

**A CHANGE IN SLEEPING HABITS** -- sleeping too much or too little

**APPETITE AND/OR EATING ALTERATIONS** -- eating too much or too little, weight change

**LOSS OF INTEREST IN ACTIVITIES** a person once enjoyed

## Three Steps That Will Help Your Child Be His or Her Own Advocate

It can be scary to think of your child out in the world managing his or her own health care. Research shows that the pathway to adulthood is not clear and it does not happen quickly. Your child is probably used to you making doctor's appointments when you think it is necessary and taking care of details such as medical histories and insurance. Be sure your child is armed with the tools needed to advocate for him or herself.

### 1 THE RIGHT PAPERWORK.

Whether they need insurance information, social security numbers, phone numbers, medical records or anything else, be sure your child has the necessary information to seek health care on his or her own.

### 2 UNDERSTAND HOW TO ADVOCATE.

Growing up, children think adults have all the answers. Be sure your child knows if he or she is having a mental (or physical) health issue, that they need to seek help.

### 3 HOW TO ARTICULATE NEEDS.

Teens can often be vague about what it is specifically that they need. Teach them how to communicate what they need.

*Research shows that only about 25% of young people aged 18-25 years old consider themselves to be adults. It's important for a child going into the adult world to understand that people will now see them as adults, and that is one of the reasons it is so important to advocate for themselves.*

**i For more information:**  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18179338](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18179338)

# SUPPORT FOR YOUR MILITARY-BOUND CHILD

Now that your child is an upperclassman, he or she is leaving the safe confines of K-12 school to embark on their adult life. If that involves joining the military, you may have mixed feelings. You are likely proud of them for taking this step to serve our country, but perhaps you are nervous for their safety, or maybe they are joining a life you are not familiar with.

**To support your child, there are a few steps you can take.**

- » **LEARN ABOUT THE DIFFERENT BRANCHES AND BENEFITS.** If your child hasn't yet chosen a branch, this is a very important step. Each military branch, active duty and reserve, has its own culture and lifestyle. There is a lot of identity and pride that comes from being a member of each branch.
- » **UNDERSTAND THE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS.** A new recruit must be 18 years old or 17 with the permission of a parent. He or she needs a high school diploma or GED. Depending on the branch in which your child is interested and for what kind of job they are looking, a person's medical and legal history can also influence their ability to join the military.
- » **MEET WITH A RECRUITER.** Accompany your child on his or her visits to the recruiter. The visits are completely private and there is no obligation for your child to join as a result of the meeting(s). Be sure to find out from the recruiter how your child will seek and receive medical care (physical and mental).
- » **GET SPECIFICS ABOUT HEALTH CARE.** Most large military bases have military treatment facilities, commonly called MTFs. If your child is entering one of the reserves, he or she probably has access to a family assistance office. Get the specifics ahead of time so that you're not scrambling if you face a difficult situation.

**i** For more information: <http://todaysmilitary.com/guidance/supporting-your-child>

## *Have a Crisis Plan*

If you think your child is at risk of having a mental health crisis once he or she is no longer living with you, it is important to have a plan that you work on together. Make sure you both understand what exactly constitutes a crisis, and establish how you will contact each other in an emergency.

Your crisis plan will depend on where your child is going - college, workplace, or military. Familiarize yourself and your child with the crisis resources available to you, and decide what resources you will activate first. Establish your mode and frequency of communication, to reduce your worry when you don't hear from your child after a certain amount of time.

It is important for young adults and their parents to know that health care providers will not contact parents, even in a mental health crisis, without consent from the patient. It will be up to your child to involve you in a crisis situation. Setting a concrete plan now will help your child if a crisis should occur. Therefore, parents and their children need to work together.

**i** Most importantly, be aware that you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline any day of the year at any hour of the day at 1-800-273 TALK (8255).



## YOUR CHILD IS MOVING OUT - HOW WILL YOU COPE?

You have been preparing them for independence since the day they were born, yet it is still hard to see your child move out of the house. You may or may not be thrilled with where they are going, but it is still difficult to adjust to the changing family dynamic now that your child's day-to-day home is no longer under the same roof as you.

Activate your support network. Be honest with the people around you if you are struggling with your child moving out. You may not want to sound "ungrateful" if your child is moving on to college or another new life that you have wanted for a while, but your reaction is your own. There is no right or wrong way to feel about your child moving out. Lots of people expect to react in a certain way and therefore feel like they are not entitled to react another way. Own how you feel!

Embrace a new or renewed passion. You have probably wondered over the past 18 years what you would do if you didn't have to tend to your child's needs. Even if you have other kids at home, you'll have more time. If you already know what you'd like to do with your newfound time, do it!



## THREE WAYS TO FIND YOUR PASSION

If you are someone who has a passion, and you've been waiting to have time to pursue it, you are in luck. However, if you have been focused primarily on work and family life, you might have a little exploring to do. Below are 3 steps to finding your passion.

1. **Think about your childhood.** What did you love to do when you were little? Were you someone who loved to tinker with crafts, or were you happiest climbing trees? Whatever it was, perhaps you can tap into that happiness again with an adult version of the activity.
2. **Determine when you feel most content.** Think about the activities you do that you look forward to doing. For example, you may find something mundane such as walking your dog to be an enjoyable activity. Perhaps you want to volunteer for an animal shelter, or even help out a busy neighbor with pet care.
3. **Ask those closest to you.** Ask the people you spend a lot of your time with when they see you most happy and what they think about your hobbies/passions. You may be surprised at what they tell you.

Still having trouble thinking about what you want to embrace? Think about where you go when you walk into a bookstore. Do you gravitate toward the books about religion? Sports? History? It will give you some indication about what interests you the most.