

# How to Talk to Your Parents About Getting Help

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We hear from a lot of teens who say they think they need help with an emotional or mental health issue, but they aren't sure how to tell their parents, or are afraid to bring it up.

It's understandable — telling parents that you're facing something that feels really big, like anxiety or depression, can be tough.

If you're very anxious, maybe it's embarrassing to admit that things that seem easy for other people are very hard — actually painful — for you. Maybe you already feel like they're angry at you for not doing things they think you should be able to do.

If you're depressed, and you've been withdrawn, spending a lot of time in your room and avoiding the family, maybe you worry that they won't understand, and will just tell you to "snap out of it." Or that they will be disappointed in you.

But it's a parent's job to help you out, and they are almost always more sympathetic, and less judgmental, than you imagine. You're likely to be more important to them than you realize, and they're not really feeling happy if you're not happy. But first you need to let them know how you're feeling. Here are some tips to make talking about it a little easier.

**1. Know that there's nothing wrong with asking for help.** "It's just like having a hard time in math," says Child Mind Institute psychologist Jerry Bubrick. "You'd go to your parents and say, 'Listen, I'm really struggling with math and I need extra help. Can you help me get that help?' " Keep in mind that experts say people who are successful in life are not those who don't have any problems, but those who are good at getting help and rebounding from adversity.

**2. Bring it up.** Pick a low-key moment. "Don't sit them down like, 'Hey, I just killed someone,'" advises Dr. Bubrick. It's easier to talk when everyone is feeling comfortable. You don't want to be competing for their attention with other things or siblings.

**3. Explain how you're feeling.** Say what you're having trouble with, and how it's affecting you. For example, "I'm realizing it's really hard for me to participate in class. Even if we're just reading out loud, I'm terrified the teacher will call on me. I get really anxious and I can't concentrate. Sometimes I feel so anxious I say I'm sick so I can stay home from school."

Or maybe, "I'm not feeling like myself these days. I'm tired all the time, and I don't want to do things after school. I feel sad all the time — I don't feel right."

**4. Say you want help.** Don't get caught up trying to analyze or explain why you might be feeling this way. Just say, "I want to see someone who can help. I want to learn some strategies so I can start feeling better."

If they say what you're describing sounds normal —everybody gets nervous or down sometimes—let them know that you're pretty sure this is more serious than that. The way you feel is making you unhappy and keeping you from doing things you want to do.

**5. If you need to, try again.** "It isn't always a good time for parents to talk," says Child Mind Institute psychologist Rachel Busman. "If you feel like your parents brushed you off before, try asking them again." Sometimes it takes parents a little time to get the message. But Dr. Busman recommends this time setting aside time to talk. Say, "There's something that I want to talk to you about, and it's important. When are you going to be free to talk?"

Dr. Busman says going to another adult you trust can be helpful, too. An aunt or an uncle can help you talk to your parents about how you're feeling. A trusted adult at school, like a teacher or a school psychologist, is also a good option. "Even if you're having problems at school, someone there will want to help you," says Dr. Busman. "It's their job to help you feel successful."

**6. Don't wait.** The sooner you ask for help, the sooner you'll start feeling better, so don't put the conversation off. You'll be proud of yourself afterward, and feeling less alone can be a big relief.

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