

# Brought to you by *Connect with Kids*

F A M I L Y G U I D E

## BEHIND THE MASK

*Topic: Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Suicide*

### The Facts

- ☛ Anxiety is the most common mental health problem in children and adolescents. (American Psychiatric Association)
- ☛ Childhood depression affects 1 in 33 children and 1 in 8 adolescents. (National Mental Health Association)
- ☛ Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 15 to 24. (CDC referencing Anderson and Smith, 2001)

### Start a Conversation with Your Kids

1. Recall a time when your child acted anxious or stressed. Ask your child: At that time, what caused the stress? What did you do to feel better? Share a time when *you* were under stress and what you did to cope.
2. Consider your family dynamics when it comes to handling anxiety and stress. Has your child seen you work through stressful situations positively? Has a family member dealt with anxiety or depression? Sometimes discussing with these at the appropriate time with your child will help him or her trust you with discussing his/her problems.
3. Ask your child: What are the signs that a friend is depressed? What about anxious? How can you help a friend, or get help for yourself, when these feelings won't go away?

### Advice From the Experts

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, teens can reduce stress with the following behaviors and techniques:

- **Exercise and eat regularly, avoiding excess caffeine intake**, which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation.
- **Learn relaxation exercises** such as yoga, abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques.
- **Learn practical coping skills**. For example, divide a large class assignment into smaller, easier-to-handle tasks.
- **Reduce negative self-talk**. Challenge negative thoughts about yourself with alternative neutral or positive thoughts. "My life will never get better" can be transformed into "I may feel sad now, but my life will get better if I work at it and get some help."
- **Learn to feel good about doing a competent job** rather than demanding perfection from yourself and others.
- **Take a break**. Activities like listening to music, talking to a friend, exercising, drawing, writing or playing with a pet can reduce stress.
- **Build a network of friends** who help you cope in a positive way.

