

ASK THE EXPERTS

HINSDALE CENTRAL SOCIAL WORKERS

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How can parents help their children avoid depression?

The Hinsdalean sat down with five Hinsdale Central social workers recently to talk about teens and depression as part of the paper's series on suicide (see Page 5 story).

During that conversation, Jennifer Cave, Allison Fish, Ilyssa Hoffman, Claudia Kelly and Jim Kupres shared several insights on how parents can help their children learn to be resilient young men and women whose self-image is not based solely on their achievements.

One of their suggestions was affording teens the opportunity to experience failure and learn how to respond to it.

"How do we give kids an opportunity to successfully fail?" Kelly posed. "I think you have to give them space to do it. There has to be a support network. After kids fail, there has to be somebody who loves and cares about them to say, 'I'm so sorry that you feel bad but I love you and I'm still here and life is still OK.'" Creating a safe place for kids to fail does not mean

they are exempt from consequences, Cave said. Parents just need to be clear about the message they are sending.

"You might get a consequence, but I still love you," is the message that should be sent, she said.

Teens also need to understand that failure is part of life for everyone. Parents can illustrate that with examples from their own lives.

"We're not perfect. My own kids need to know I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes," Cave said.

Kelly agreed. "It's OK to share with them, 'This was an epic failure and it didn't turn out great. Here's what I learned from it. Here's what it taught me and it changed my outlook for the better,'" she said.

Parents need to acknowledge that their teens are living in a much different world than the one they grew up in, the social workers said.

"I think teenagers appreciate the validation that things are different now," Fish said. "I didn't have that constant social media growing up."

Parents who demonstrate openness are more likely to have teens that are willing to be honest.

"It's that open dialogue, expressing some of our failures, that helps with

that rapport," Cave added. "Nothing like that happens overnight."

The social workers also agreed that parents need to set boundaries for teens. Teens can have a difficult time navigating between high school, which is highly structured, and a home life that lacks rules and expectations.

"Kids want to know what they can and can't do," Kupres said.

Parents also might want to think about how they talk to their teens about what it means to succeed. Teens need to have input.

"What does success look like for you and how do we get you there?" is a question teens should be asked, Hoffman said. Kelly also encouraged looking beyond traditional definitions of the success.

"We talk a lot about success," she said. "What about happiness? Happiness has to be part of the formula and part of the motivation to do things."

Kupres recommended parents learn as much as they can about the most effective ways to raise kids.

"I think the more we can become educated as parents, the more we can help our kids, too," he said.

— by Pamela Lannom

Symptoms of depression

Depression is more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch. It's a serious mental health condition that requires understanding, treatment and a good recovery plan. With early detection, diagnosis and a treatment regimen of medication, psychotherapy and healthy lifestyle choices, many people get better. But left untreated, depression can be devastating, both for the people who have it and for their families.

People with depression or who are going through a depressive episode experience symptoms differently.

The symptoms of a major depressive episode include

- Loss of interest or loss of pleasure in all activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Feeling agitated or feeling slowed down
- Fatigue
- Feelings of low self-worth, guilt or shortcomings
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Suicidal thoughts or intentions

Source: nami.org