



### HOPE FULL: FAMILY

We don't want to think of our children hurting themselves intentionally or feeling hopeless, but we have to realize that the possibility is there. A 2015 study of over 65,000 high school students from 11 U.S. states found that nearly 18% had self-harmed without the intention to commit suicide. That's approximately 11,700 students.<sup>1</sup>

We hear similar statistics everywhere, and may have even asked ourselves: Why are kids doing this to themselves? The answer is rather nuanced. Depression and similar disorders have many possible causes from environmental to genetic, and each person has a different experience with the disorder.

Accepting that it could happen to anyone helps us let go of the stigma around depression and other mental health issues, which are (thankfully) beginning to fade across the country.

Once we've accepted this reality, we can look at our kids, and honestly assess how they're doing, regardless of how convincing their after-school response of "Fine" might suggest. In an article for the non-profit Child Mind Institute, Ron J. Steingard, M.D., advises parents to look for changes in sociability, mood, appetite, energy level, sleep patterns, and academic performance.<sup>2</sup>

Even with a careful eye, we may miss the signs that not all is right in our child's world. It's important for us to communicate with them, and let them know we won't be disappointed or upset, and that we are here for them no matter what. Even if we are not the right person for them to talk to, we can help them find the person who is.

We can also help them by providing perspective that in seeking short-term relief, they will just gain long-term loss or pain. That doesn't mean harshly judging self-harm, as teens may interpret that as judgment of them. We want to make clear that it's not the right coping mechanism and provide them with healthier ways to cope instead.

### /// BEST 5 ///

#### THE BEST FIVE MINUTES OF THE WEEK

Does your family communicate openly about things like mental health, including anxiety and depression? How can you be more open to discussing sensitive topics like that?

Do you know the symptoms of depression and similar mental health issues? Have you experienced any of them?

Have you or someone you know ever self-harmed or considered self-harming? Why did you do it, or why did they?

What are better ways of coping with difficult times or negative emotions? Have each family member make a list of 5 things and compare notes.

How does your personal experience (or lack of it) influence how you think about mental health? For example, does it make you more empathetic?