



## **The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann**

Dear Parents and Guardians,

My nephew recently shared with me that his 7th grade daughter started showing signs of depression and anxiety. She had been a happy-go-lucky kid who seemingly had everything going for her. She was good and responsible in school, she was excelling in sports, and she had a ton of friends. He was struggling to imagine what she had to be anxious about in life. He wished he could make it better with a flick of magic wand. I'm sure you would hope to have the same superpower when your kids are struggling...

In the world we live in today, almost all teenagers struggle with anxiety in some way. Many of them have learned how to mask it, but some level of it is there. The world they live in, especially with technology and social media dominating their thoughts, is a breeding house for anxiety. They feel pressure to perform in every area of life. They feel like they have to get good grades, they have to perform in sports or the arts, they have to perform on social media, and sadly, some of them feel like they have to perform at home to earn their family's love.

So, the question is, what can we do about it? Parents and other caring adults have to pay closer attention to the anxiety that may be growing under the surface and do some things to actively help our kids find themselves in a healthier place. I offer you now a few thoughts for you as you help your teenagers continue to grow.

**First, lead with empathy.** When your teenagers face anxiety of any kind, you have to put yourself in their shoes and help them believe that you hear them, you see them, and you empathize with how they feel. If they believe you are just trying to push them through it, it likely won't work. You have to make a connection with them first, and they have to believe that you understand what they are going through. Once they believe that, doors can open to having real conversations that need to be had.

**Secondly, we have to celebrate the small wins along the way.** There will be times when your kids will be anxious about some things that feel very small to us; when we see them be able to work through it, we have to let them know that we see the win. We have to help them say that they can overcome their anxiety as they move through life. Try using this phrase - "I know it's hard, but you can do it." When teenagers start to believe that they have what it takes to overcome things that are difficult, their anxiety level goes down, and they will be much better situated for adult life.

**Finally, we have to know that this is most definitely a spiritual battle.** We have to teach our teenagers that God can overcome anything. The God who overcame sin and death can live in them if they choose to follow Him. We all know that if we simply try to muster up our own strength to fight anxiety, it will not work for the long haul. Sure, we can develop coping mechanisms, but a true faith and trust in God is what will lead our kids to the abundant life we hope they will have.

**Part of this spiritual battle should include prayer.** Prayer should be the first thing we do for and with our kids. Praying for our kids is something that we can do all the time, and praying with our kids could give them a sense of understanding that God is with them no matter what. Even if praying with your teenager looks like you being the one with all the words, that's OK. Frequently ask them if you can pray for them, and then do it on the spot. It doesn't have to be a long, eloquent prayer, but simply a quick petition to God asking Him to be with them, comfort them, and lead them.

**And this leads me to my final encouragement, which actually comes from God...** The Bible says in Philippians 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

As parents, you have the opportunity to model what it means to rejoice in God and have our identity rooted in Him. You can be gentle as you lead with empathy. And you can lead your teens to understand that offering themselves, their situation, and their anxiety to God can lead them to a peace that is bigger than anything they can ever experience anywhere else. Be encouraged!

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# 10 IDEAS TO HELP YOUR TEENAGER NAVIGATE AND COPE WITH ANXIETY



## OFFER EMPATHY:

When your teenager is anxious, start by **EXPRESSING EMPATHY** which lets them know they are **SAFE** and **SECURE** in your love. Consistently leading with empathy will also help your teenager see the Lord's love for them through you.

## VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS:

It's important for our teenagers to **FEEL HEARD** and **UNDERSTOOD**. Your teen's emotions (as all over the place as they may be) are very real to them. Tell him or her that what they're feeling is okay. You don't have to like or agree with their feelings to validate them feeling their feelings.

## PRAY:

Pray **FOR** and **WITH** your teen regularly. Show them that talking with the Lord about our anxieties and expecting Him to answer is very important. Teach him or her to know how to pray by providing simple words to ask for the Lord's help. **1 Peter 5:6-7** says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you."

## MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE:

God's Word is our source of **HELP** and **HEALING**. Find Bible verses about the Lord's peace, love, and protection, like **Philippians 4:7**, and **Revelation 21:4**

Memorize the verses with your teenager, text them these verses as a reminder, or encourage them to write these verses in a place where they will see them often and be reminded of God's truth and love.

## JOURNALING:

For some teens, drawing or writing about their feelings can be therapeutic. Provide your teenager with a special journal for them to use any time they want to express their **THOUGHTS** and **EMOTIONS** when they are anxious, worried, or fearful.

## GIVE THEM WORDS:

Teenagers often need help in developing a vocabulary to talk about or describe their anxiety. **TALK** about words they can use and what they mean, and **HELP** them use these words as they describe what they are feeling.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH:

Teenage bodies can become depleted when experiencing high levels of anxiety. This is especially true when mixed with the normal fluctuation of hormones and lack of sleep that are normal during this particular stage of development. Be sure to continue or adopt a **HEALTHY DIET** to provide the nutrients they need. Encourage physical activity by joining them!

## BREATHE:

In high-anxiety situations, shallow breathing often occurs. Help your teenager learn to calm themselves by teaching them **DEEP BREATHING**. Have them put a hand on their chest and belly to feel them fill up with air, and then exhale slowly until they are calmer.

## USE THE SENSES:

Engaging one of your teen's five senses can also have a calming effect. **SEEING, FEELING, HEARING, TASTING**, and **TOUCHING** are ways to help them break out of the worry cycle by focusing on something else. Some find fidget toys very helpful. The more the senses engaged, the better.

## SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:

If your teen's daily life is negatively affected and you are concerned that their anxiety is more than just typical adolescent experiences, don't hesitate to reach out for **PROFESSIONAL HELP**. Get a medical examination for physical symptoms and find a trusted therapist. There is no shame for the teenager or the parent in **ASKING FOR** and **SEEKING HELP**.

