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### Like Mother, Like Daughter

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## Like Mother, Like Daughter

### By Maihcen Ware

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I was in high school when I began to distance myself from my closest friends. I stopped loving activities I used to love, and I was constantly fatigued and hopeless: I slept too much, cried too much, and over thought too much. I began wondering, “Why can’t anyone see that there’s something wrong, and am I the only one who feels like this?”

One night toward the end of high school, my mom came into my room and told me she noticed I had not been my normal self for a while. She shared her concern for me and began to validate all of these feelings.

In awe, I began to wonder how she

understood my personal struggles so well. I learned that she had struggled with depression her whole life—and now, I shared in that burden. Like mother, like daughter. And, little did I know, my mother and I are not alone.

Research indicates that compared to an average person, those who have a parent with major depression<sup>1</sup> are two to three times more likely to have depression at some point in their life. Those whose parents experience recurrent depression or had an early onset of depression have an even greater chance of developing depression, increasing their odds by four to five times.<sup>1</sup>

The National Center for Biotechnology Information<sup>2</sup> further

confirms these trends: adolescents without a mother suffering from depression tend to be depressed about 15 to 20% of the time while adolescents with a mother with depression tend to be depressed about 20 to 40% of the time. Indeed, teens born to depressed parents are also more likely to have behavioral problems<sup>3</sup> and mental disorders than other adolescents. In essence, a parent’s own struggles may limit their ability to be there for their teens.

Understandably so, with these high risks of depression, parents may wonder how to help their adolescents. Here are three evidenced-based ways parents can assist teens who are struggling with depression.

## Recognize and Act on Warning Signs

When my mom recognized that there was something wrong and discussed what she saw, I felt an immense weight lifted, because I finally didn't feel alone in my struggles. Someone saw me. Like my mother did, one of the best things a parent can do for a teen with depression is to pay attention to warning signs for depression and take them seriously.

Warning signs<sup>4</sup> of depression may include “low self-esteem, withdrawal, lack of interest, hopelessness, academic success deterioration, drastic changes in eating habits (too little or too much), feeling guilty and ashamed, lack of energy and motivation, fatigue and aches, [and] thoughts of suicide and death.”

Understanding the difference between situational depression and clinical depression<sup>5</sup>—the first is short-term and the latter is more severe—can also aid you in helping your teen. Clinical depression might need more of an in-depth and long-term management plan. For example, prescription medication and professional therapy might be more needed for those diagnosed with clinical depression. With situational depression, it might go away the depressing/stressful event passes that onset the depression and is often short-term.

Taking warning signs seriously means not just acknowledging your adolescent might have depression, but also taking further action. Just

like treating physical pain, emotional/mental distress must be healed and validated as well. Something you can do is ask your adolescent how you can help them. Because every person is different, the same approach that helped one teen may not help another.

Taking warning signs seriously also means taking your adolescent seriously. Brushing their depression off, either intentionally or unintentionally, may not make it easier for them to open up. Treat depression as if it is a life or death situation—because sometimes, it is. Because my mom recognized the warning signs for depression and took them seriously, I was much more able to learn to cope with my depression than if she did not.

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### Validate Experiences

After recognizing the warning signs in your adolescent and taking them seriously, validate what they are feeling. Validation<sup>6</sup> does not require completely understanding what they are experiencing; however, validation does involve understanding that their feelings are very real to them and telling them what they are experiencing is real and extremely challenging.

Some ways that you can help validate your teen's experiences include telling them how glad you are that they

trusted you with their difficulties, showing that you are there to listen without judgement, and sharing with them that their struggles do, indeed, sound arduous.<sup>7</sup> When my mom validated my emotions in these ways, my feelings became real, which meant I could find real solutions.

### Nurture Mental—and Physical—Health

At home, provide them with the support they need each day. For example, doing things such as ensuring their physical health is maintained can also help their mental state.<sup>8</sup> Nurturing physical health by exercising<sup>9</sup> or even going outside consistently<sup>10</sup> can also foster better mental health outcomes

for your adolescent. When you have created and fostered a healthy relationship<sup>11</sup> with your teen and they know suggestions about their depression are coming from a place of love, encouraging physical health, which can help mental health, might be particularly helpful.

### Take Care and Be Aware

Children of depressed parents are not doomed to follow in their parents' footsteps, but they are at higher risk. Being aware of this idea by recognizing and acting on the warning signs, validating emotions, and encouraging physical health can make all the difference for a teen struggling with depression. In these ways, and others, my mom has encouraged me to live a better life and to choose joy—even when my brain is shoving me to a dark funk. My mom is strong—and has made me strong. Like mother, like daughter.

## Endnotes

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- 10 Pearson, D. G., & Craig, T. (2014). The great outdoors? Exploring the mental health benefits of natural environments. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01178>
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