So parents and caring adults know how to help a teen, and teens know how to ask for help, all to improve teen mental wellness and prevent teen suicides.
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August 2021

Dear Caring Community Member,

With people becoming more aware about mental health, you might assume that everyone knows how to recognize depression and how to help a teen reach wellness. Unfortunately, that’s not the case. Whether due to insufficient information, misunderstanding about depression, fear of talking about it, or a lack of strategies or confidence, parents, teachers, and other caring adults can be reluctant to intervene even when they have concerns about a teen’s mental health.

Although twenty percent of youth will have experienced depression by their mid-20s, teens often feel alone in their struggle. This leaves them vulnerable to bullying, academic failure, eating disorders, and feelings of hopelessness. They might seek relief through misusing alcohol and other drugs, self-harm, or the very worst: ending their lives through suicide. Nationally, for the age group 10-24, suicide is the 2nd-leading cause of death.

The most recent Health & Risk Behaviors of Massachusetts Youth Survey of high school students showed that 27% of students reported symptoms of depression; 12% said they had seriously considered suicide; and 5% reported that they had attempted suicide. Here in Massachusetts, at least 79 individuals under age 25 died by suicide in 2018, the most recent data available.

Since Spring 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the way that our kids interact and learn. Researchers have documented a sharp increase in stress, anxiety, and depression among youth. Our teens will have to learn how to live and thrive in the post-pandemic world. We have the opportunity to help them develop strategies to deal with life’s challenges and know when and how to get the care they need.

A 2019 study found that the most reliable and effective intervention to prevent teen suicides is for teens to have trusted adults to turn to, and for those adults to know about depression and suicide prevention. We are pleased to be able to provide programs – whether in person or virtually – that support your community’s teens as well as their parents, teachers, and other caring adults.

Our workshop provides the opportunity for parents or teachers to learn about teen depression from a mental health professional. Our Teen Speakers are passionate about reducing stigma and encouraging other teens to seek help. These teen and young adult volunteers demonstrate that people their age can manage life with mental health conditions.

To learn about FFDAs’s free programming for Massachusetts communities, contact our Teen Depression Program Coordinator at teens@familyaware.org or 781-890-0220. Together, we can provide the education and resources that your families and community members need to support teens’ mental wellness.

Very truly yours,

Susan Weinstein
Co-Executive Director

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TEEN DEPRESSION PROGRAM

FOR TEENS
- Teen Speakers Program
- Stress Survival Guide

FOR ADULTS
- Teen Depression Workshop
- Parent Speakers
- Family Wellness: Addressing Stress and Depression Workshop
- Teen Webinars & Group Viewings

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS
- Resource Cards
- Face Sheets

Find out more at www.familyaware.org
Families for Depression Awareness (FFDA) helps families recognize and cope with depression and bipolar disorder to get people well and prevent suicides. A national nonprofit organization based in Waltham, MA, FFDA was founded on the belief that caring family members play a powerful role in uniting their families and ensuring that no one with depression or bipolar disorder suffers alone. Since we launched in 2001, we have become the premier mental health organization specializing in family caregiver support. We were one of the first mental health organizations to feature real people telling their stories of living with depression and bipolar disorder (“mood disorders”)—an effort that has helped break down the stigma of mental health issues. Our trainings provide practical education and actionable advice that equips participants to recognize mood disorders and intervene effectively.

Families for Depression Awareness has a dedicated staff and visionary leadership through its board of directors and advisory board, each of whom has a personal and/or professional connection to our cause. Our directors are responsible for the organization’s strategic vision, fundraising objectives, and fiscal oversight. The Advisory Board includes nationally-recognized clinicians, researchers, and other mental health professionals as well as our Family Caregiver Advisory Panel of volunteers whose families have been touched by depression or bipolar disorder.
There were several well-known cases of teen suicide that occurred across Massachusetts from 2000 to 2008. In one town alone, two students from the same school died by suicide within months of each other. It was a troubling trend, the aftermath of which reverberated among our community of parents, family caregivers, and advocates. Many parents were frightened because they did not understand what signs of depression they should be looking for in their kids. In addition to their overwhelming grief, parents who had lost their teens to suicide feared for the emotional health of their other children. School districts hurriedly put together suicide crisis plans. This was a difficult time in our communities.

Looking for how we could help, we considered our organizational strengths. First, we already had a guidebook about monitoring depression and bipolar disorder treatment in teens. We also had connections with schools and psychiatric hospitals in the area, and our volunteer network included clinicians and families. From these resources, we began reaching out to find the best clinicians to help us develop more content on identifying teen depression and intervening. Their assistance led to the creation of a workshop that we began presenting at parent meetings and community events. We then recruited teens who have lived experience with depression or bipolar disorder, gave them public speaking training, and partnered them with schools who were looking for peer-to-peer discussion leaders. Our community volunteers made care packages for teens who were hospitalized for suicidal ideation or attempts. We worked with suicide prevention and postvention groups to go into schools and provide training. This effort, which eventually coalesced into our Teen Depression Program, has helped us reach thousands of Massachusetts parents, teens, and school personnel.
**Mission in Action**

**FFDA TEEN DEPRESSION PROGRAM**

2020-2021 Results

- **2,280**
  Teen Depression Webinar Registrants

- **3,800**
  Teen Depression Resource Cards
  Distributed in English, Spanish, and Portuguese

- **1,564**
  People trained through our MA Teen Depression Workshop and Teen Speaker Events

- **18**
  Active Teen Speakers

- **23**
  Virtual Teen Depression Events

**HOW TO BECOME A TEEN SPEAKER FOR FFDA**

1. Experience living with a mood disorder with treatment and support

2. Have a passion to share your lived experience and reduce stigma

3. Meet with FFDA to learn public speaking skills and refine your story

4. Learn our program and collaborate with other Teen Speakers

5. Present your story to other teens in schools and community settings
Overview of Programs for Adults

*Intended for an adult audience, e.g., parents, guardians, family members, teachers, youth workers, other caring adults*

### Understanding Teen Depression Workshop

*(60 to 120 minutes)*

This on-site or virtual workshop is facilitated by FFDA staff and delivered by a mental health professional. Participants will learn how to recognize depression in teens, get teens help and find treatment, communicate effectively with teens about depression, and access community resources. Our staff will work with the event organizers to customize the material to your group’s specific needs.

### Parent Speakers

Parent Speakers are adults who have raised or are raising a teen or young adult living with depression, bipolar disorder, or other mental health conditions. Their stories include how they recognized that their teen was having mental health problems, what they did to help, and mistakes they made. Parent Speakers can be scheduled to share their stories during our Understanding Teen Depression Workshop or as a panel event. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions to our speakers.

### Addressing Family Stress and Depression Workshop

*(60 to 90 minutes)*

Does your family have the tools they need to address life’s stressors? By being knowledgeable about self-care and mental health, you can help your family get on the path to wellness. This on-site or virtual workshop is facilitated by FFDA staff and delivered by a licensed mental health professional. During the training, participants will learn how to identify symptoms of stress in themselves and family members, manage stress as a family, respond when symptoms become “more than stress,” and get help for themselves or a family member.

### Teen Mental Health Webinars and Group Viewings

*(60 to 120 minutes)*

Our recorded Teen Mental Health Webinar series is a growing resource of archived webinars exploring topics related to depression and teen mental health. You can show these free webinars at an in-person event or share them for participants’ viewing in advance, using our group viewing guide and topic-specific discussion questions. Families for Depression Awareness staff are also available to help facilitate virtual group viewings and guide discussions.
Teen Speakers

(30 to 60 minutes)

This on-site or virtual event features Massachusetts teenagers and young adults who have lived experience with depression and bipolar disorder. Teen Speakers share their stories of identifying symptoms, seeking adult support, finding effective treatment, and learning how to stay well. This workshop aims to end mental health stigma by demystifying mental health conditions and to encourage help-seeking among teenagers and young adults.

Stress Survival Guide Workshop

(45 to 60 minutes)

Pressures from school, family, friends, work: our teens are surrounded and burdened by stress from all sides. Because untreated stress can lead to mental health conditions like depression, our teens need to develop practical strategies to manage day-to-day stress. During this workshop, a trained facilitator shares their experience of surviving stress and depression throughout their teen and young adult life. Participants will learn the signs of stress and depression, identify strategies to manage day-to-day stress, and begin to create a survival guide of their own!

Educational Materials

Printed materials are distributed during our teen and adult programming and available as independent resources. These materials include our Teen Depression Resource Cards and Teen Depression Fact Sheets. Using youth-friendly terms, the wallet-sized Teen Depression Resource Card includes information on key signs of depression and getting help, self-care tips, and crisis numbers for national and statewide suicide prevention organizations. Our Fact Sheets provide a concise overview of depression to help people know when they should seek help. These materials are available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.
From Fall 2017 through Spring 2018, we hired a third-party contractor, Partners for Greater Good, to evaluate the efficacy of our Teen Speakers events. Students were given the Children’s Attribution Questionnaire (AQ-8-C) immediately before and after participating in an event. This questionnaire measures eight specific judgments or stigmas students may experience related to stereotyping and prejudice against peers with mental health challenges. Results showed that all judgment areas moved in the desired direction, from higher to lower levels of negative judgment. The judgment with the greatest effect size was pity, with a statistically-significant and categorically-moderate change. The next largest effect sizes occurred with fear, segregation, dangerousness, and blame. This indicates that, through FFDA Teen Speaker peer-to-peer engagement, students are less likely to stigmatize students with mental illness and treat them differently in a negative way. We believe we are leading the way to healthier teens, more empathetic teen relationships, and, most importantly, no more teen suicides.
“The most important or interesting thing I learned today was the difference of how depression looks from person to person. Each story was so different and hearing different perspectives is very beneficial.”

— Freshman High School Student, Marblehead, MA

Families for Depression Awareness has changed my life in more ways than I can describe. It has given me the confidence to fully and wholly share my story without shame, strengthened my passion for supporting those who are struggling, and allowed me to experience the sense of purpose I so often lose living with my depression. Though I’ve since graduated from the Teen Depression Program, I plan to continue contributing to this amazing organization whenever and however possible.

— Elizabeth, FFDA Teen Speaker Alumni

“The content of the workshop was very engaging. I have ignored many of the signs that were shared today. I did not feel equipped before this workshop.”

— Teacher, Andover, MA
What makes FFDA’s teen program different from other mental health programs?

As an organization, FFDA is oriented toward educating family caregivers—who usually operate with little support or guidance—and other adults so they can help the people they care about to address depression and bipolar disorder. We concentrate on depression and bipolar disorder, the most prevalent mental health conditions and those that factor in the vast majority of suicides. In addition to education, we provide actionable advice and guidance about helping loved ones access treatment and get well. Our strategy is to reach and teach as many people as we can, so they can put a name on the problem and begin to do something about it.

Our connections with local school systems and communities enable us to keep our material fresh, timely, and relevant. Our program has a solid record in Massachusetts over the past 10+ years. Our teen and young adult speakers are volunteers who participate because helping others helps them to stay well, and even more are welcome to join.

Why should we trust FFDA to present on this sensitive topic?

We have been providing trainings on teen depression and suicide for more than ten years and we know that discussing topics like depression and suicide can be difficult for adults and teenagers. We work closely with our Advisory Board of respected clinicians to develop curriculum and we engage licensed clinicians to deliver our Teen Depression Workshop. The clinician uses their professional wisdom to answer parent/adult questions and address any immediate concerns.

During our Teen Speaker events, we coordinate with the host organization and have staff available to attend to any audience members who may be in distress. We provide resources for teens who may want to follow up regarding their own mental health and we inform the attendees about school-based or local services, often by dedicating time for a host organization staff member (such as a school psychologist or guidance counselor) to speak. We always discuss how to get help in a crisis situation so that participants—whether adults or teens—know what they can do for themselves or someone else who is considering suicide.

Are the Teen Depression Workshop and Teen Speaker events done together or separately? Do we have to do both?

The workshop for adults and peer speaker event for teens can be scheduled for the same day or independent of each other. If presented simultaneously, we separate the teens and adults into different rooms and deliver the appropriate training to each audience. Either program or both programs can be scheduled to be held during the school day (e.g., school assemblies) or as an afternoon or evening event, whether on the same day or not. You can also hold a separate workshop for teachers and school personnel, such as during a professional development program. You are not required to hold both events, you can also choose to do one or the other.
Frequently Asked Questions

Can you hold a Teen Speaker event for multiple grade levels?

Yes! We can hold one speaker event with multiple grades or separate speaker events for individual grades to attend. Depending on the size of your school, you may choose to focus on a specific grade annually or offer the program to the whole school at one time.

What is the fee for a FFDA Teen Depression Program event?

Thanks to the generous support of local foundations and families, the Teen Depression Program is grant-funded so there is no out-of-pocket cost associated with the events. If your school or organization does have a budget for the event, we suggest you use it on refreshments in order to increase event attendance. If you would like to help other organizations bring FFDA’s program to their community, we gratefully accept charitable donations, but there is absolutely no obligation to do so. We appreciate the opportunity to reach more families and help more teens.

Do you have a minimum attendance requirement for your programs?

For our adult programming, we have a minimum attendance of 20 participants in the audience. For our teen programming, we have a minimum attendance of 15 participants in the audience. Please contact FFDA if you have any questions or concerns.

Will the workshop/speaker event address teen suicide prevention?

The ultimate goal of all FFDA programming is to prevent suicides. During our Teen Depression workshop, we help adults become comfortable talking about teen depression and suicide, and then intervening when necessary. Our Teen Speakers, all of whom are emotionally stable and following a treatment plan with their provider, address teen suicide prevention by sharing their personal experiences with depression and suicidal feelings, while empowering teens to ask for help. All of the teens in our program have learned when and how to ask for help either through their own experiences or through volunteering in our program.

Can I recommend a teen or young adult to become a Teen Speaker?

Absolutely! We are actively recruiting teens who want to share their stories and support their peers in getting help. All of our teens report that sharing their story is therapeutic and helps them stay well. Contact us at teens@familyaware.org or 781-890-0220.

What information should I provide to FFDA in planning my event?

You can provide all the necessary information by filling out this form (http://bit.ly/FFDA_MAform). We typically need to know which event(s) you would like, when you would like the event to take place, and how many people you are expecting. We ask for further information to ensure that we can tailor the program to your specific needs.
Are you able to customize programs to a specific community audience?

In our educational events, we always try to account for each community’s experience. To that end, we confer with our community host about recent events and concerns, the community’s history with teen mental health issues and suicide, and school-based and local resources for parents and teens. We then adapt our program to deliver the curriculum that serves the community. Due to time and funding constraints, we are not able to develop and deliver an entirely new program for each event, but we can draw on the content we have created. This allows us to tailor our presentations with material about, for example, bullying or non-suicidal self-injury. Let us know what you would like and we’ll see what we can do!

What is the format of your programs?

We will be offering both virtual and on-site events based on community decisions as well as Public Health guidelines. Fill out a program request form and we can connect to discuss available options.

What platform is used to present virtual events?

FFDA offers programs via Zoom so that we can oversee the technology. However, we can usually transition to the platform that your school or organization regularly uses, as long as

- we can hold a “dry run” to get familiar with the platform and its functions
- there is an A/V technician designated to work with us
- we can control the slide changes.

Contact us for information.

I’m concerned that some people will react to the presentations and need support during a virtual event. What can you do about that?

We talk about difficult topics that can prove challenging for participants. Sometimes they need support to get through the moment. What we can offer depends on your organization’s capacity. We usually start the program with comments about how the material might affect participants and outline the supports available to them. These might include any of the following:

- Open a Zoom room and one of your counselors or staff people can lend support
- Share the phone number of a school staff member who will be available to talk during the event
- Share crisis resources at the beginning of the program and occasionally throughout using the chat (e.g., crisis text line, 2-1-1, school-based services)

We also like to have the appropriate school personnel (guidance counselor, social worker, etc.) identify themselves to the participants and explain what they can offer and how to reach them.
Additional Resources & Videos

Teen Speaker Event, Brookline MA

This 18 minute video gives an example of what a Teen Speaker Event can look like in your community. View this link: http://bit.ly/2ysupjq

![Image of two people speaking]

Scan this code with your smartphone.

Parenting Perspectives On Supporting Teen Mental Health

This promotional video gives an overview of a virtual Parent Speaker Event. View this link: https://youtu.be/eRbU2UBqeFo

![Image of a poster with text: "Learn from Peers"]

Scan this code with your smartphone.
Teen Depression Webinar Series

Our webinars cover topics such as Understanding Teen Depression, Anxiety, Substance Use and more.
View this link: https://familyaware.org/teenwebinars/

Join FFDA’s Teen Speaker Program

Do you have lived experience with depression or bipolar disorder and would like to share your story?
Learn more here: https://youtu.be/s_MLm2rwk4c
Teen Speaker Spotlight

See one of our Teen Speakers in action! Max shares her story of noticing the signs of depression, seeking help, and finding wellness. View this link: http://bit.ly/2JMkedz

Scan this code with your smartphone.

For More Information

To schedule an event or get more information, contact

Teen Depression Program Coordinator
teens@familyaware.org
(781) 890-0220

Families for Depression Awareness
391 Totten Pond Road Suite 101
Waltham, MA 02451

www.familyaware.org/communitypartner
We look forward to working with you!