



## Pediatricians screening for depression as early as age 12

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For teens and their parents getting through adolescence isn't easy. But how do you know when your child's feelings of sadness or hopelessness are more than just typical growing pains?

"Sometimes it's like you think you're on top of things, but you may not be," said Elizabeth, a Tucson mom with four kids between the ages of nine and 16.

In addition to her four younger children, Elizabeth has another daughter who is now 18. Mom tells us her kids all seem to be doing well right now. Though, she is one of the lucky ones.

"Just this summer, three kids that I know have committed suicide," Elizabeth said.

In fact, the numbers show a startling trend. For 2015, which is the most recent year that statistics are available, 3,000,000 adolescents ages 12-to-17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode. Experts also say the numbers have been rising. And, they point to one big one big reason:

"Simply put, the studies show the more kids use social media, the more heavy they use the media, the more likely they are to be unhappy," said Tucson pediatrician, Dr. Duane Dyson. He is now doing his part to reverse the trend of childhood depression. One way he is doing that, is through having his young patients take a depression survey as early as age 12.

"We're trying to tease out: are they really going through something they aren't sharing with their family that's more chronic, that their parents may think is just a week or two, but it's really been going on for a few months?" Dr. Dyson told us.

For parents like Elizabeth, the survey that asks the adolescent questions about their mood, appetite, or thoughts of suicide is critical to knowing how her kids are doing mentally.

"I think sometimes, you know, they might say something or he's going to pick up on something that I wouldn't pick-up on. Or they might tell him, and not me kind of thing," Elizabeth told us.

Dr. Dyson stresses that when it comes to mood disorders, like depression, factors like family history or major changes in home-life are things to watch out for.

“If the parents are divorced, if someone has moved in or out, if there's been a death in the family, even if the parents relocate, If the kids relocated to a different city or a different school, that can be enough to kind of tip the scale,” Dr. Dyson said.

According to Dr. Dyson, above and beyond surveys, it's important for parents to take the time to actually talk to their kids -- face-to face. And, to occasionally pull the plug on their online activity.

“First and foremost, cut down on their social media time. So, the more time kids can actually dialogue with each other, then the more happy they're going to be,” Dr. Dyson told us.

“I think you need to know what's going on with the kids before it's too late,” added Elizabeth.