

Information on Depression for Teens

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a common and serious condition that can affect your thoughts, feelings, behavior, and overall health. Approximately 10 to 20 out of 100 teens get seriously depressed each year, and many more have mild levels of sadness or the blues. There is hope for teens with depression because it can be treated.

WHEN YOU'RE DEPRESSED, YOU MIGHT THINK, FEEL OR ACT IN SOME OF THESE WAYS

- You feel sad or cry a lot and it doesn't go away.
- You feel guilty easily; you feel like you are no good; you've lost your confidence.
- Life seems empty or like nothing good is ever going to happen again.
- You tend to think negatively, like believing that you can't do anything right.
- You have a negative attitude a lot of the time, or it seems like you have no feelings.
- You don't feel like doing a lot of the things you used to enjoy—like playing music, sports, being with friends, going out – and you want to be left alone most of the time.
- It's hard to make up your mind. You forget lots of things, and it's hard to concentrate.
- You get angry often. Little things make you lose your temper; you overreact.
- Your sleep pattern changes; you start sleeping a lot more or you have trouble falling asleep at night. Or you wake up really early most mornings and can't get back to sleep.
- Your eating habits change; you've lost your appetite, or you eat a lot more.
- You feel restless and tired most of the time.
- You think about death, or feel like you're dying, or have thoughts about hurting yourself or committing suicide.

Some teens who are depressed also can get “manic” at times, which may be a sign of bipolar disorder. When you're manic, you may feel or act in some of these ways

- You feel high as a kite... like you're “on top of the world.”
- You get unreal ideas about the great things you can do—things that you really can't do.
- Thoughts go racing through your head and you talk a lot.
- You're a nonstop party, constantly running around.
- You do too many wild or risky things, like reckless driving, spending money, and having sex with multiple partners.



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This handout may be distributed to families.
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- You're so "up" that you don't need much sleep.
- You're rebellious or irritable and can't get along at home or school, or with your friends.

IF YOU THINK YOU'RE DEPRESSED... TALK TO SOMEONE!

If you have had some of these symptoms and they have lasted a couple of weeks or have caused a big change in your routine, you should talk to someone who can help, like a psychologist, nurse, or doctor, or your school counselor!

TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

Having depression doesn't mean that a person is weak, or a failure, or isn't really trying ... it means they need treatment. Most people with depression can be helped with counseling, and some are helped with counseling and medicine. Cognitive behavioral and interpersonal therapies are the best evidence-based type of therapy for depression.

Counseling means talking about feelings with a special healthcare provider who can help you with the relationships, thoughts, or behaviors that are causing the depression. Don't wait; ask your parents or your school counselor for help today. Medicine is used to treat more serious depression. These medications are not "uppers" and are not addictive. When depression is so bad that you can't focus on anything else, when it interferes with your life, medication might be necessary along with counseling. But most often, counseling alone works. With treatment, most depressed people start to feel better in just a few weeks.

WHAT ABOUT SUICIDE?

Most people who are depressed do not kill themselves. But depression increases the risk for suicide or suicide attempts. It is NOT true that people who talk about suicide do not attempt it. Suicidal thoughts, remarks, or attempts are ALWAYS SERIOUS ... if any of these happen to you or a friend, you must tell a responsible adult IMMEDIATELY It's better to be safe than sorry.

The National Suicide Prevention hotline has people available to talk to anyone who is suicidal 24 hours a day and can be reached at 1-800-273-8255.

WHY DO PEOPLE GET DEPRESSED?

Sometimes people get seriously depressed after something like a divorce in the family, major money problems, the death of someone they love, a messed-up home life, or breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Sometimes depression happens because of negative patterns of thinking so learning to turn negative thoughts to positive helps. Other times, depression just happens. Often, teens react to the pain of depression by getting into trouble: trouble with alcohol, drugs, or sex; trouble with school or bad grades; problems with family or friends. This is another reason why it's important to get treatment for depression before it leads to other trouble.

MYTHS ABOUT DEPRESSION

- **MYTH:** It's normal for teens to be moody; teens don't suffer from "real" depression.
FACT: Depression is more than just being moody; and it affects people at any age.

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- MYTH: Telling an adult that a friend might be depressed is betraying a trust. If someone wants help, he or she will get it.

FACT: Depression, which saps energy and self-esteem, interferes with a person's ability or wish to get help. It is an act of true friendship to share your concerns with an adult who can help. No matter what you "promised" to keep secret, your friend's life is more important than a promise.

- MYTH: Talking about depression only makes it worse.

FACT: Talking about your feelings to someone who can help, like a psychologist or nurse practitioner, is the first step toward beating depression. Talking to a close friend also can provide you with the support and encouragement you need to talk to your parents or school counselor about getting help for depression.

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