

The Facts about Depression and Suicide

It is not unusual to have the blues or feel down occasionally. Being a young adult can be unsettling, full of change and growth. The expectations of your family and friends and the fear of not meeting those expectations can create stress and worry. When things go wrong at school or at home, you may feel unsure of your abilities or question how you fit in. On top of that you are constantly faced with tough choices; choices that could affect the rest of your life. You may sense conflicting messages from parents, friends and society.

Dealing with pressures

Developing strategies for coping can help you deal with feeling down and other problems.

- **Make good friends.** Good friendships are important for positive self-esteem and provide an important social outlet.
- **Participate in sports, work, school activities or hobbies.** Staying busy can help you focus on positive things rather than negative feelings or behaviors, and can help build self-esteem.
- **Ask for help.** When problems are too much to handle alone, don't be afraid to ask for help.

But sometimes, when moods make life difficult on a day-to-day basis, you may become depressed...

Recognizing depression

Everyone should know the warning signs of depression and be ready to take action. Depression is a serious problem that calls for prompt, appropriate care. Early detection and treatment can help you feel like yourself again.

If you think you might be depressed, know that you're not alone. Research indicates that as many as one in eight teens, and 19 million adults, suffer from clinical depression.

Many factors can contribute to depression. Studies show that the way the brain works plays a role in depression. A family history of depression may increase the risk. Difficult life events (such as death or divorce), side effects from some medications and negative thought patterns can also play a role.

Depression can take several forms, including bipolar disorder (formerly called manic-depression), which is a condition that alternates between periods of euphoria and depression.

The following symptoms may indicate depression, particularly when they last for more than two weeks:

- Withdrawal from friends, family and school activities
- Sadness and hopelessness
- Lack of enthusiasm, energy or motivation
- Anger and rage
- Overreaction to criticism
- Feelings of being unable to meet expectations
- Poor self-esteem or guilt

- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness
- Restlessness and agitation
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Substance abuse problems
- Thoughts of suicide

When unrecognized, feelings of depression may be expressed by experimenting with drugs or alcohol, being sexually promiscuous or by hostile, aggressive, risk-taking behavior. But such behaviors only lead to new problems, deeper levels of depression and difficult relationships with friends, family, and law enforcement or school officials.

Treatment for depression can put you back on track and give you hope for the future.

Treating depression

As well as being real and common, depression is also treatable. It is extremely important that you receive prompt, professional treatment if you're depressed. Depression is serious and, if left untreated, can worsen to the point of becoming life threatening.

Talking with a mental health professional can help you understand depression and how to cope with stressful situations. Depending on the situation, such talk therapy may consist of individual, group or family counseling. Sometimes medications may be prescribed by a health care professional skilled in treating teens with depression to help you feel better. Some of the most common and effective ways to treat depression in young people are:

- Psychotherapy-provides an opportunity to explore events and feelings that are painful or troubling and teaches coping skills.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy-helps change negative patterns of thinking and behaving.
- Interpersonal therapy-focuses on how to develop healthier relationships at home and at school.
- Medication-relieves some symptoms of depression and may be prescribed along with talk therapy.

When you recognize the need for help, you have taken a major step toward recovery. Seek support and encouragement from your friends and family, talk with a mental health professional and follow treatment recommendations.

Facing hopelessness

Sometimes you can feel so depressed that you may consider ending your life. You may see a temporary problem as one that will never get better. If you are having thoughts about suicide, get help. Suicide is never the answer.

Tips for Friends and Family

Recognizing the warning signs of suicide

Four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warnings. Pay attention to these warning signs:

- Suicide threats
- Giving away belongings
- Obsession with death
- Poems, essays and drawings that refer to death
- Dramatic change in personality or appearance
- Irrational, bizarre behavior

- Overwhelming sense of guilt, shame or rejection
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Severe drop in school performance
- Irritability

Remember-These warning signs should be taken seriously. Get help immediately. Err on the side of caution. Your action may save a life.

- **Offer help and listen.** Encourage your friend or loved one to talk about their feelings. Listen, don't lecture. Don't be afraid that asking about suicide will give someone the idea.
- **Trust your instincts.** If the situation seems serious, get help right now. Tell a secret, if necessary, in order to save a life.
- **Pay attention to talk about suicide.** Always take it seriously and get help immediately.
- **Seek professional help.** It is essential to seek expert advice from a mental health professional who has experience helping young people with depression. Also, alert key adults in the youth's life-family, friends, teachers and coaches.

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