

## Teen Depression

It's not unusual to have the blues or feel down occasionally. The teen years can be an unsettling time, full of change and growth. The expectations of your teachers, family and friends – and the fear of not meeting them – 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 face choices about friendships, sex, alcohol and drugs. You may sense conflicting messages from parents, teachers, friends and society.

## Dealing with pressure

Developing strategies for coping can help you deal with stress:

- Connect with people. Good friendships are important for positive self-esteem and provide an important social outlet.
- Do things you enjoy. Staying busy can help you focus on positive things rather than negative feelings or behaviors, and can help build self-esteem.
- Ask a trusted adult for help. When problems are too much to handle alone, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Sometimes, when your moods make life difficult on a day-to-day basis, you may become depressed. Then, more than ever, adult guidance can help you to understand everything that is happening.

## Recognizing depression

Everyone – teens and adults – 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 have clinical depression.

Many factors can contribute to depression. Studies show that the way the brain functions plays a role in depression. A family history of depression may increase the risk as well. Difficult life events (such as death or divorce) side-effects of 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 highlighted by mood swings that may include periods of heightened energy or irritability and depression.

# What You Need to Know...



Sometimes, depression can be difficult to diagnose. People do not always understand or express their feelings, and may not be aware of the symptoms of depression or the need to seek help.

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

## Treating depression in teens

Depression is not only real and common, it's 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 stress.

Depending on the situation, talk therapy may consist of individual, group or family counseling. Medications may also be prescribed by a healthcare professional who is skilled in treating teens with depression. Some of the most common and effective ways to treat depression in teens are:

**Psychotherapy:** This type of therapy provides an opportunity to explore events and feelings that are painful and troubling, and teaches coping skills. Two types of psychotherapy include:

- 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:** Medication can relieve 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 concerned adults, talk with a mental health professional and follow treatment recommendations.

## Knowing the symptoms

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

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# What You Need to Know...



- Feelings of being unable to meet expectations
- Poor self-esteem or guilt
- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness
- Restlessness, agitation and irritability
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Substance abuse problems
- Thoughts of suicide.

## Facing the danger of suicide

You may feel so depressed that you think about ending your life. You may see a temporary problem as one that will never get better. Feelings of anger and resentment combined with guilt can lead to impulsive, self-destructive acts. Sexual identity issues are also a frequent cause of suicidal behaviors. If you're having thoughts about suicide, get help. **Suicide is never the answer.**

## Tips for friends and family

Recognize 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
- Decreased interest in friends
- Dramatic change in personality or appearance
- Irrational or bizarre behavior
- Overwhelming sense of guilt, shame or rejection
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Changes in school performance
- Irritability

*Remember – These warning signs should be taken seriously. Get help immediately. Don't take chances. Your actions may save a life.*

- Offer help and listen. Encourage your friend or loved one to talk about their feelings. Listen, don't lecture.
- Trust your instincts. If the situation seems serious, get help right now. Break a confidence, if necessary, in order to save a life. Alert key adults – family, friends, teachers and coaches.

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## What You Need to Know...



- Pay attention to talk about suicide. Don't be afraid that asking about suicide will give someone the idea.
- Seek professional help. It is essential to seek expert advice from a mental health professional who has experience helping depressed teens. Urge your friend or family member to seek out help.

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at (414) 276-3122.

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