



Teen Depression

Depression is defined as an illness when the feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair persist and

interfere with a child or adolescent's ability to function.

Depression isn't a sign of weakness, but a real medical illness. The vast majority of teens with depression can be helped with treatment, which typically includes counseling and/or medication. Unfortunately, most teens with mental health problems do not get the help they need. And when depression isn't treated, it can get worse, last longer and prevent teens from getting the most out of life.

How Common is Depression Among Teenagers?

Over the past 50 years, depression has become more common and is now recognized at increasingly younger ages. About 5 percent of 9 - 17 year olds are estimated to suffer from depression at any given point in time. Major Depression strikes about 1 in 12 teens. Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have attention, learning, conduct or anxiety disorders are at a higher risk for depression. Teenage girls are at especially high risk, as are minority youth.

Depressed youth often have problems at home. In many cases, the parents are depressed, as depression tends to run in families. Depression can lead to poor school attendance and performance, running away and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness.

Some teens try to make the pain of depression go away by drinking or taking drugs. Sometimes they even think of suicide.

What are the Symptoms Teen Depression?

It is important to remember that the behavior of depressed children and teenagers may differ from the behavior of depressed adults. The characteristics vary, with most children and teens having additional psychiatric disorders, such as behavior disorders or substance abuse problems. Mental health professionals advise parents to be aware of signs of depression in their children. If one or more of these signs of depression persist, parents should seek help:

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable
- Large changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses, such as headaches and stomachaches
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Lack of connection with friends and family.
- Low self esteem and guilt
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty with relationships
- Threaten to run away from home
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school

- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Self-injury such as cutting
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Teens may show their pervasive sadness by wearing black clothes, writing poetry with morbid themes, or having a preoccupation with music that has nihilistic themes.
- Teens may feel that life is not worth living or worth the effort to even maintain their appearance or hygiene. They may believe that a negative situation will never change and be pessimistic about their future.

Depression Can Take Many Forms

Some teens experience only one episode. Other teens may experience bouts during their teen years. Some suffer from bipolar disorder (previously called manic-depressive disorder), which involves severe mood swings from periods of depression to periods of high energy, overly inflated self-esteem, and agitation or hyperactivity.

Teens may assume blame for negative events or circumstances. They may feel like a failure and have negative views about their competence and self-worth. They feel as if they are not "good enough."

Depressed teens are often irritable, taking out most of their anger on their family. They may attack others by being critical, sarcastic, or abusive. They may feel they must reject their family before their family rejects them. Children and teens who cause trouble at home or at school may actually be depressed but not know it. Because the child may not always seem sad, parents and teachers may not realize that the behavior problem is a sign of depression.

How Can You Help?

Early diagnosis and medical treatment are essential for depressed children. Depression is a real illness that requires professional help, self-help, and support from family and friends.

Comprehensive treatment often includes both individual and family therapy. Although there are real concerns about antidepressant medication, most mental health professionals continue to recommend their use. In fact a recent study of over 439 adolescents with Major Depression, showed improvement only in the groups that were also on medication. Become an educated team member with your physician to decide what is best for your child. It may save his or her life!

(Resources: Focus Adolescent Services - www.focusas.com/Depression.html; National Youth Violence Youth Resource Center - www.safeyouth.org)



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