



Depression in Teens

It's not unusual for young people to experience "the blues" or feel "down in the dumps" occasionally. Adolescence is always an unsettling time, with the many physical, emotional, psychological, and social changes that accompany this stage of life.

Unrealistic academic, social, or family expectations can create a strong sense of rejection and can lead to deep disappointment. When things go wrong at school or at home, teens often overreact. Many young people feel that life is not fair or that things "never go their way." They feel "stressed out" and confused. To make matters worse, teens are bombarded by conflicting messages from parents, friends and society.

Teens need adult guidance more than ever to understand all the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing. When teens' moods disrupt their ability to function on a day-to-day basis, it may indicate a serious emotional or mental disorder that needs attention — adolescent depression. Parents or caregivers must take action.

Dealing with Adolescent Pressures

When teens feel down, there are ways they can cope with these feelings to avoid serious depression. All of these suggestions help develop a sense of acceptance and belonging that is so important to adolescents.

- **Try to make new friends.**

- **Participate in sports, job, school activities or hobbies.**
- **Join organizations that offer programs for young people.**
- **Ask a trusted adult for help.**

But sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, teens become depressed. Many factors can contribute to depression. Studies show that some depressed people have too much or too little of certain brain chemicals. Also, a family history of depression may increase the risk for developing depression. Other factors that can contribute to depression are difficult life events (such as death or divorce), side-effects from some medications and negative thought patterns.

Recognizing Adolescent Depression

Adolescent depression is increasing at an alarming rate. Recent surveys indicate that as many as one in five teens suffers from clinical depression. This is a serious problem that calls for prompt, appropriate treatment. Depression can take several forms, including bipolar disorder (formally called manic-depression), which is a condition that alternates between periods of euphoria and depression.

Depression can be difficult to diagnose in teens because adults may expect teens to act moody. Also, adolescents do not always understand or express their feelings very well. They may not be aware of the symptoms of depression and may not seek help.

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

- Poor performance in school
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Sadness and hopelessness
- Lack of enthusiasm, energy or motivation
- Anger and rage
- Overreaction to criticism
- Feelings of being unable to satisfy ideals
- Poor self-esteem or guilt
- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness

- Restlessness and agitation
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Substance abuse
- Problems with authority
- Suicidal thoughts or actions

Teens may experiment with drugs or alcohol or become sexually promiscuous to avoid feelings of depression. Teens also may express their depression through hostile, aggressive, risk-taking behavior. But such behaviors only lead to new problems, deeper levels of depression and destroyed relationships with friends, family, law enforcement or school officials.

Treating Adolescent Depression

It is extremely important that depressed teens receive prompt, professional treatment.

Depression is serious and, if left untreated, can worsen to the point of becoming life-threatening. If depressed teens refuse treatment, it may be necessary for family members or other concerned adults to seek professional advice.

Therapy can help teens understand why they are depressed and learn how to cope with stressful situations. Depending on the situation, treatment may consist of individual, group or family counseling. Medications that can be prescribed by a psychiatrist may be necessary to help teens feel better.

Few adolescents seek help on their own. They may need encouragement from their friends and support from concerned adults to seek help and follow treatment recommendations.

Facing the Danger Of Teen Suicide

Sometimes teens feel so depressed that they consider ending their lives. Each year, almost 5,000 young people, ages 15 to 24, kill themselves. Studies show that suicide attempts among young people may be based on long-standing problems triggered by a specific event.

Recognizing the Warning Signs

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

- Suicide threats, direct and indirect
- 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
- Changed eating or sleeping patterns
- -Severe drop in school performance
- Giving away belongings

REMEMBER!!! These warning signs should be taken seriously. Obtain professional help immediately. Caring and support can save a young life.

Looking To The Future

When adolescents are depressed, they have a tough time believing that their outlook can improve. But professional treatment can have a dramatic impact on their lives. It can put them back on track and bring them hope for the future.



For more information, contact the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee at (865) 584-9125.

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