



# Understanding Depression in Teens

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Everyone feels sad sometimes. Sadness is a part of life. It is the appropriate response to the sad things that happen in life. "Normal" sadness lasts for a short time, and then goes away without leaving long-lasting effects. Depression is a change in mood that persists over time. It doesn't go away on its own. It interferes with a person's ability to enjoy life, even when good things are happening. It drains all your energy and stops you from taking part in activities you used to do easily. It makes everything seem pointless. Depression causes lasting changes in thinking, relationships, and way of life.

## WHAT DEPRESSION IS LIKE:

- Irritable, agitated, easily annoyed or numb
- Sad, crying easily and difficult to soothe
- Overly self-critical
- Constantly bored and unable to find anything enjoyable to do.
- Low energy and difficulty getting motivated
- Overly sensitive to criticism, rejection or failure
- Sulking, withdrawing from social situations, not wanting to spend time with friends
- Whining and complaining - focusing on what's wrong and inability to see what's right in situations
- Sleep problems including difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, waking up during the night and having difficulty getting back to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Nightmares or dreams that are disturbing or distressing
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Physical complaints such as headaches or stomachaches
- Changes in eating habits - eating too much or not at all
- Being very difficult to please
- Getting into fights or trouble at school
- Not wanting to go to school and/or not wanting to participate in other activities



**"People think depression is sadness. People think depression is crying. People think depression is dressing in black. But people are wrong. Depression is the constant feeling of being numb. Being numb to emotions, being numb to life. You wake up in the morning just to go to bed again."**

- Larry Walthour

*Suffering in Silence*

## CRISIS HELP

**Never ignore comments about suicide.** It's a myth that talking about suicide could plant the idea in someone's mind. If they're talking about it, or hinting about it, chances are they're already thinking about it. You can make a difference by listening and by helping to connect that person with professional care. For help on how to respond, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255), the Crisis Center 330-452-6000 or send a text to 741 741.

## HOW TO HELP A TEEN WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION:



Talk about what they're experiencing. Let them know it is safe to express their thoughts and feelings, even the ones that are not so comfortable for you to hear.



**Express** - It can be hard to put feelings into words. There are lots of ways to express yourself - art, music, dance, photography, etc.



**Listen** - You don't have to have all the answers or know how to fix every problem. Just listen without judging and empathize with the struggle.



**Gratitude** - Every day identify 3 things to be grateful for, 3 things that were achieved or 3 good things that happened. This helps to remind the teen that not everything in life is bad.



Counter negative views of self by saying how proud you are of them. Notice the positive things they do and let them know they are doing a good job. Describe what you like about them.



Help to look for and recognize examples of what is good in the world and in humanity.



**Plan** - Plan something enjoyable for every day. Plan something to look forward to in the near future and in the longer term. Display these plans on a calendar to create a visual reminder.



**Routine** - Make sure they get out of bed and get dressed every day. Set regular bed and wake times. Eat regular meals. Plan tasks to do.



**Accept** - It's never helpful make light of a teen's depression by saying they're being dramatic or feeling sorry for themselves. Depression doesn't feel good. If they could cheer up, they would.

## 3 TYPES OF THOUGHTS THAT SUSTAIN DEPRESSION

- **Negative view of self** - I'm not good enough, I am a bad person, I never get anything right, nobody likes me.
- **Negative view of the world and others** - The world is a cold, cruel place and people are awful and uncaring.
- **Negative expectations for the future** - My life is miserable and it's not going to get any better.

**Depression is a disorder, not a choice. You don't get over it just by deciding to be positive or cheer up.**

## IS IT DEPRESSION OR JUST BEING A TEEN?

If you aren't sure whether the behavior you're seeing is depression or just normal teenage moodiness, look into how long it has been going on, and how different the teen is acting compared to their usual self. Hormones and stress can explain the occasional bout of teenage angst - but not continuous and unrelenting unhappiness, lethargy or irritability.



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