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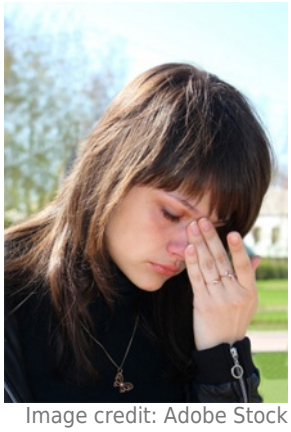
Depression in Youth: Youth Edition



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Summary: Depression is a medical condition that can make you feel so sad, that you have troubles functioning. It can get so bad, that you feel that life isn't worth living. The good news, is that depression can get better. With support from family and friends, or with help from doctors, depression can get better. If you think you are depressed, start by telling a trusted adult, such as a parent, relative, or teacher. If there is no adult to talk to, then contact a HelpLine (such as KidsHelpLine) in your area.

Amanda's Story

I used to be happy go lucky when I was younger. But when I got to be a teenager, things started to get really stressful.

- My parents split up.
- I got into a fight with some friends on social media.

I felt so alone. I felt like nobody cared about me. I got realy depressed, and at times, I felt life wasn't worth living.

But then I saw a picture of myself with my parents when I was younger -- it reminded me how happy I used to be. I decided to give my mom a chance -- so I told her what was happening and how I was feeling...

What is Depression?

It is normal to feel sad from time to time. But this sadness shouldn’t stop you from going on with your everyday activities. And it goes away on its own. Depression, on the other hand, is a sadness so severe that it interferes with everyday life.
Youth going through a depression often:

- Feel sad, worried, irritable or angry
- Have trouble enjoying anything
- Feel hopeless and worthless
- Have trouble coping with everyday activities at home, school, or work
- Have trouble doing simple things, like having a shower or brushing teeth
- Have problems with sleep, energy, appetite and concentration

With severe depression, youth may even hear voices, or have thoughts of harming themselves or others.

Depression is more than normal sadness. A depressed person can’t ‘just snap out of it’. Studies even show physical changes in people’s brain chemistry when they are depressed.

How Common is Depression?

its not just you. Depression is very common.

Studies show that about 1 in 5 people will go through a depression by the time they turn 18.

Getting help is important, because there are effective treatments for depression. Early treatment can stop depression from coming back in the future.

What Causes Depression?

There is no one single cause for depression -- rather, there are different things that can add to it:

- Family history: If there have been people in the family with depression or stress, there is a bigger chance that you may have depression. The good news is that this means they will hopefully be more understanding of what you are going through.
- Stresses in life, such as problems with parents, brothers and sisters; problems with peers (e.g. bullying); school stresses; losing someone close to you; many others.

I Think I'm Depressed -- What Should I Do?

What would you do if you had a broken arm? You'd get help right away from an adult, like telling your parents, a teacher or a health professional like a doctor.

Its the same with depression.

You can:

- Talk to an adult that you trust, e.g. your parents, your teacher, guidance counselor or your doctor. Parents or a trusted adult can help you see a doctor. Let the doctor know how you’re feeling. S/he can check for medical problems that might be causing the depression. The doctor may suggest mental health services, and can help you link with psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers or counsellors.

Nobody to talk to?

- Call a crisis line to get help. That's what they are there for.

How Does Depression Get Better?

When you see a professional, they can help in different ways. Every person is different. Some treatments work well with some youth, but not with others. If a treatment isn’t working (after giving it a good try, of course), your professional may talk with you about trying something else. Its okay if something doesn't work -- there are many different treatments (and professionals) out there.

Start with Healthy Lifestyle

Do's

- Get enough sleep -- at least 8-11 hours daily for a teenager. Poor sleep can cause lower mood and energy levels.
- Eat a healthy diet.
  Do your best to eat lots of fruit and veggies.

Eat more omega 3 fatty acids, which some studies show might be helpful.
Eat less junk food (such as soft drinks, pop, candy, potato chips, fast foods such as ffrench fries, or hamburgers)
Try to eat more meals made at home, and less processed foods.

- Get outside. Studies show that being outside in nature is a powerful antidepressant, especially in the sunlight.
- Spend face to face time with other people. Human beings are social -- we need face-to-face time with other people. Don't expect others to be your therapist. Start by just doing healthy things together, like going for a walk outside.

Don'ts

- Don't turn to video games, internet and screens to feel better. A little bit of screen time a day is okay (up to 1-2 hrs/daily max), but any more than that, it stops you from being able to do the things that help your mood. Like get enough sleep, spend time outside, or be with people face-to-face.
- Don't use street drugs and alcohol to feel better. While getting high can sometimes make you feel better at first, it eventually makes things worse, not to mention costing a lot of money.

Talk Therapies

1. "Talk Therapy" or Psychotherapy

Talking therapy is when you see a counselor/therapist and talk about what is going on, and come up with solutions. There are many types of talking therapies, which include cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT); dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT); interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT), and many others.

Advantage: When you receive talk therapy, you can learn new ways to cope that can help you for a very long time.

Disadvantage: It takes effort to see a therapist for talk therapy.

Medications

When talking therapies haven't helped, doctors may recommend trying a medication.

Advantages: They can be helpful when other things haven't help.

Disadvantage: They may have side effects. Some people are worried about being 'dependent' or 'being weak' if they take medications. On the other hand, if you had asthma, would you think it would be better to ‘get over it’ without treatment?

Are antidepressants safe? Some people are worried about the safety of antidepressants for youth. Research shows that when used in the right way, and monitored by a doctor, antidepressants are safe and effective. Like prescription eye-glasses, medications must be chosen and adjusted for each child or teen.

While some people have strong views about medications for depression – a balanced look at antidepressant treatment is the most helpful. Medications are not all bad, but they are not needed all the time, either.

Outpatient and Inpatient Services

Youth with depression are usually treated in ‘outpatient’ clinics or community mental health centres. If the depression is severe, you may need more intensive support from a day/ evening program or by staying in hospital.

Parent and Family Support

Your parents are probably the people who can give you the most support. For most youth, parents are the ones who’ll be there for them when no one else is. Sometimes though, parents who are struggling with their own difficulties can’t give their kids needed support. If this is your situation, you’ll need to reach out to other adults in

your life-a grandparent, aunt, uncle, teacher, coach or counsellor.

If you're having conflict with your parents

Most youth have conflicts and disagreements with their parents at one time or another. But if this is happening all the time, then it's time to try to work on things. Conflicts often arise over things like your parents' expectations about school, chores or house rules (like curfews).

The fact that your parents have expectations for you is actually a good thing (although you might disagree about what the expectations should be). It means that your parents care about you. But conflict and arguments are no fun for anyone. But there are ways to make it easier to talk with your parents and resolve conflicts.

How to Talk with Your Parents

Invest in a little time together. Try to spend some one on one time with one of your parents. Maybe start with the parent you feel closest to. Invite your parent to do something with you-a walk, shopping, a movie, a game of cards, cooking or tossing a frisbee around. Parents love it when you show that you want to spend some time with them. This positive time together gives you a chance to strengthen your relationship, and you may feel more comfortable sharing what's on your mind.
"*Mom, I've been really stressed out lately. Could we find some time to talk about it? Maybe go for a coffee tonight?*"

Pick a good time to talk. Think about the best time to approach your parents. When they are tired or grumpy after work may not be the best time.

Think about your parents' point of view. You don't have to agree, but it helps to understand 'where they're coming from'.

Tell parents how they can support you. Most parents really do care and want to help. But they may not always know what to do, and they can't read your mind. You have to tell them.
"*Dad, I know you're really trying to help, but when I tell you how I'm feeling-I just need you to listen. When you jump in with advice, I feel like you don't really understand the way I feel. It helps me to just get things off my chest. Then, if I need advice, I can let you know.*"

Use "I messages". Using "I-messages" is the best way to get your points across, and can prevent the other person from reacting defensively.

So what are "I-messages"?

"I" messages are ways of expressing yourself, beginning with "I". They are a respectful way to get your point across, without threatening others.

- " I think..."
- "I'd like..."
- "I feel..."
- "I need..."
- "I believe..."

What's Stressing You?

We all carry our worries and stresses with us in a kind of backpack. When it gets too full, it's heavy and it weighs us down. It makes us feel sad, depressed, anxious, angry, irritable or overwhelmed. Think about the stresses you're carrying around with you.

Lightening your load

You can unpack some of the stresses and worries in your backpack by taking a problem solving approach. It can really help to talk with a parent or another adult you trust about this. Talk about a situation that is bothering you,

and try to come up with ways to improve things. Remember that solutions don't always work out at first. And you may need to try a few different things to make things better.

For example, if you're having trouble in school, you could:

- Talk with your mom about it
- Together, come up with ideas that might make things better (Get help after school? Talk with your teacher about extra time for that assignment? Maybe cut back on activities that are causing the most stress? Explore different ways to manage your time? Cut down on some things until you're caught up? Change your courses?)

If you've been having a lot of conflict with one parent:

- Talk with your other parent (if you can't, talk with another adult you trust). Say something like, "Something's really bothering me, and I need some help with it.")
- Try talking with the parent you're having trouble with. Remember to use 'I messages'. It can help to start off by saying something positive like, "I remember when we used to be able to have fun together-I really miss that. I feel sad because it seems to me that you're always criticizing me. It makes me feel that I can't do anything right."

Remember! Problems in a family aren't just for you to solve. And there are some problems that you shouldn't try to solve on your own. Family violence, sexual abuse or drug and alcohol abuse by parents are situations where you'll need the help and support of professionals (see the resource list at the end of this fact sheet).

Getting Better: Advice from Youth

Youth who have experienced depression wanted to share their experiences to help you! Here are some things that they want you to remember…

- Don't underestimate your parents. They can be a great source of help and support.
- Talking to friends can also help, try to open up to people you trust.
- If you don't have anyone you feel you can talk to right now, try to connect with other youth who would understand-like at YouthNet! www.youthnet.on.ca. Check the 'Support' section on the last page of this fact sheet.
- Depression can feel different for everyone. Youth don't all have the same symptoms or react to treatments the same way. What works for some people may not work for others. And that's OK.
- Everyone goes through rough spots, and it's really important to get help if you're struggling.
- Taking a walk, or getting some exercise can make a big difference.
- Expressing yourself through art, music or writing can help you feel better.
- Yoga and meditation are great ways to relax and focus.
- Create a 'chill out space' where you can go to relax and calm yourself. Make it a comfortable place that stimulates your senses: soft pillows, nice smells, music, play dough to keep your hands busy, gum to chew.

How to Help a Friend with Depression

Depression might make your friend seem 'different'. Your friend might seem really sad, or even angry. Depression can sometimes cause people to be really critical of themselves and others. Try to cut your friend some slack. You can help by…

- Just being there, hanging out and doing everyday things.
- Asking if they are OK, letting them know you care.
- Listening when they want to talk.
- Looking for help from a trusted adult if your friend isn't getting help yet.
- Remembering that you're a friend, not a therapist. Your friend needs the right kind of help for depression, and needs to connect with professionals for that.
- Telling a trusted adult if your friend shares thoughts of suicide. Don't keep this private, even if your friend asks you to. Sometimes you have to 'tell' to be a good friend. Think more about saving your friend than

saving the friendship. If friends have thoughts of suicide, they need to talk to someone right away.

Amanda’s Story, Part 2...

One day, I finally got the courage to tell my mom that I was sad. "Mom, can we talk?" "I've been feeling sad all the time, and I don't know what to do!" And I burst out crying.

My mom took me to see our family doctor, who suggested some places to get help.

I started talking to a counsellor. The counsellor talked to my mom too, and taught my mom ways she could be helpful to me. Instead of just giving advice, my mom became better at listening.

Its been a few months now, and I'm feeling so much better. I am so glad that I told someone.

About this Document

Written by Michel Poirier (social worker) and the Mental Health Information Team at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). Special thanks to the youth of Youth Net for their invaluable feedback and suggestions.

Disclaimer

Information in this pamphlet is offered ‘as is' and is meant only to provide general information that supplements, but does not replace the information from your health provider. Always contact a qualified health professional for further information in your specific situation or circumstance.

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