



# FACT SHEET

## TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

# DEPRESSION

### What is depression?

- Depression is a set of feelings of sadness, loss of pleasure, helplessness, and hopelessness that persist over time, for at least 2 weeks. Depression can be linked to alcohol and other drug abuse and can lead to school failure as well as suicide attempts.

### Who is depressed?

- Depression is more common among females than males. However, it occurs in people of all ages, races, income levels, and educational levels.
- Depression occurs as often in teens as it does in adults. It is estimated that one in eight teens is depressed.
- Teenage girls are two times more likely than teenage boys to be depressed.

### Who is at risk for depression?

- If you have one or more depressed parents, you are more likely to develop depression (the effects are partly genetic and partly based on the difficulties that depressed mothers and fathers have in being helpful parents).
- If you have experienced major depression, you are more likely to become depressed again within 5 years.
- If you come from unhealthy family environments (eg, you have been harshly disciplined, physically abused or psychologically maltreated, or live with a family that fights a lot), you are more likely to experience depression.

- If you have experienced major stressful life events, such as a death, parent's divorce, or violence, during the past year, you may be at higher risk of depression.
- If you have antisocial or delinquent behavior, such as frequently getting into trouble with the law, you are more likely to become depressed.
- If you experience depression, you are at high risk of being depressed during pregnancy and of becoming depressed after the baby is born (postpartum depression)

### If you are depressed, you can have other problems:

- An anxiety disorder (anxiety or nervousness accompanies depression in 60% of cases)
- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, and other physical complaints
- Frequent absences from school
- Poor grades in school
- Relationship problems (with family members, friends, or boyfriends)

### What is major depression?

- Major depression prevents a person from functioning normally. It may occur only once in an individual's lifetime, but often it can return throughout an individual's life.

### What are the symptoms of a major episode of depression?

- You may have major depression if you have five or more of the following symptoms (including at least one of the first two) nearly every day, for most of the day, for at least 2 weeks:

- Feeling sad, blue, "down in the dumps," being tearful, or irritable and cranky
  - Lack of interest or pleasure in almost all activities, including things that you used to like or feeling of boredom with everything
  - Losing or gaining a lot of weight, or a change in appetite (either decreased or increased)
  - Sleeping too much or not being able to fall asleep or to stay asleep
  - Moving slowly and talking slowly or acting restless and not being able to sit still, as observed by other people (called psychomotor slowing down or speeding up)
  - Lacking energy and feeling tired all of the time
  - Having feelings of worthlessness or guilt and self-blame, even if other people do not see a real reason for it
  - Having problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions
  - Having recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, having a specific plan for committing suicide, or trying to commit suicide
- Symptoms cause real distress and get in the way of your ability to function socially, at school, and in your families.

### How is depression diagnosed and treated?

- Depression is diagnosed by a doctor who evaluates your physical and mental condition. The doctor needs to make sure that a medical problem is not causing the depression and will explore with you and your family what background problems might have triggered the depression.



- A mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker, can provide effective treatment.
- You and your family need to work with your doctor to find the best treatment. It is very important to recognize and treat depression as early as possible in order to prevent further suffering and to make it easier to manage.

## Does depression lead to suicide?

- Sometimes teens feel so depressed that they think about suicide.
- Most depressed people do not commit or attempt suicide, but depression increases the risk for suicide and suicide attempts.
- Most people who commit suicide have depression.
- Teens who experience a loss or stressful event, such as a death, parents divorce, or violence, may attempt suicide.

## What are the warning signs of suicide?

- Suicide threats, direct and indirect (eg, “Maybe I will not be around.” or “You would be better off without me.”)
- Obsession with death or wishing to be dead
- Dramatic change in personality or appearance
- Deterioration in ability to function at home or school or socially
- Irrational, weird thoughts or behavior
- Overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, rejection, hopelessness, or feeling abandoned or trapped
- Giving away or getting rid of belongings
- Becoming cheerful after a period of depression

If anyone shows the warning signs of suicide, a mental health expert should be contacted immediately. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The toll-free number is (800) 273-TALK (8255).

## What factors protect against suicide?

- Medical care for depression, substance abuse, and medical problems
- Family and friends providing useful and valuable resources to help with problems
- No access to highly lethal means of suicide (such as firearms)
- Strong connections to family and community, such as parents, teachers, and youth leaders
- Strong, positive relationships with medical and mental health providers
- Skills in solving problems and resolving conflicts in a nonviolent way
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self preservation

## For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

**American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**  
Telephone: (202) 966-7300  
Web: [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
Telephone: (847) 434-4000  
Web: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

**American Association of Suicidology**  
Telephone: (202) 237-2280  
Web: [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

**American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**  
Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444  
Web: [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**  
Telephone: (888) 333-AFSP or (212) 363-3500  
Web: [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

**American Psychological Association**  
Telephone: (202) 336-5500 or (800) 374-2721  
Web: [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

**AWARE Foundation**  
Telephone: (215) 955-9847  
Web: [www.awarefoundation.org](http://www.awarefoundation.org)

**Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**  
Telephone: (800) 826-3632  
Web: [www.ndmda.org](http://www.ndmda.org)

**Kristin Brooks Hope Center**  
Telephone: (202) 536-3200  
National Hopeline Network: (800) SUICIDE (784-2433)  
Web: [www.hopeline.com/](http://www.hopeline.com/)

**Mental Health America**  
Telephone: (703) 684-7722 or (800) 969-6642  
Web: [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness**  
Telephone: (703) 524-7600 or (800) 950-NAMI (6264)  
Web: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**  
Public Information and Communications Branch  
Telephone: (301) 443-4513 or (866) 615-6464  
Web: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**National Mental Health Information Center**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Telephone: (240) 221-4021 or (800) 789-2647  
Web: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

**Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health**  
Portland State University  
Telephone: (503) 725-4040  
Web: [www.rtc.pdx.edu/](http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/)

**Suicide Prevention Resource Center**  
Telephone: (877) GET-SPRC (438-7772)  
Web: [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)