



FACT SHEET

TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

DEPRESSION: A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

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 associated with 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 of depression?

- Teens with one or more depressed parents 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 effective parents).
- Teens who have experienced major depression are at an increased risk of becoming depressed again within 5 years.
- Teens who come from unhealthy family environments (eg, teens who have been harshly disciplined, physically abused or psychologically maltreated, and whose families fight a lot) have an increased risk for depression.
- Teens who have experienced major stressful life events, such as a death, parent's divorce,

or violence, during the past year may be at higher risk for depression.

- Teens who have antisocial or delinquent behavior (these teens frequently get into trouble with the law) are likely to be depressed.
- Female adolescents who experience depression are at high risk of being depressed during pregnancy and of becoming depressed after their baby is born (postpartum depression).

Teenagers who are depressed 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 recurs throughout an individual's life.

What are the symptoms of a major episode of depression?

- Teens may have major depression if they 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, or "down in the dumps," being tearful or irritable and cranky

- Lack of interest or pleasure in almost all activities, including things that they used to like, or feeling bored with everything
 - Having significant weight loss or gain 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 (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 teen's ability to function socially, at school, and in their families.

How is depression diagnosed and treated?

- Depression is diagnosed by a health care provider who evaluates your teen's physical and mental condition. The health care provider needs to make sure that a medical problem is not causing the depression and will explore with your teen 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.





- Your family and your teen need to work with the 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 of suicide and suicide attempts.
- Most people who commit suicide have mental disorders, such as depression.
- Teens who experience a loss or stressful event, such as a death, parent's divorce, or violence, may attempt suicide.
- Teens who use alcohol and drugs and have conduct problems or get into trouble with the law (especially male teens) are at especially high risk of impulsively attempting suicide.
- Teens with same-sex sexual orientation are at higher risk of attempting suicide because of stigma, being socially isolated and rejected (including rejection from parents), and being victimized.
- Teens exposed to other individuals who have committed suicide, either through personal knowledge or through the media, are at higher risk of attempting suicide (this is called a "contagion effect").
- Depressed teens with access to a firearm are at increased risk of suicide.
- Teens who have attempted suicide in the past also are at much higher risk of death by 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 discarding belongings and cleaning the bedroom (putting one's affairs in order)
- Becoming cheerful after a period of depression

If your teen is showing these signs, 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 can you do to protect your teen against suicide?

- Get her medical care for depression, substance abuse, and medical problems
- Encourage effective help seeking for problems
- Allow no access to highly lethal means of suicide, such as firearms
- Encourage strong connections to family and community, such as teachers and youth leaders
- Encourage strong, positive relationships with medical and mental health providers
- Promote skills in solving problems and resolving conflicts in a nonviolent way
- 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

American Academy of Pediatrics

Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Web: www.aap.org

American Association of Suicidology

Telephone: (202) 237-2280
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
(800) 273-TALK (8255)
Web: www.suicidology.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Telephone: (888) 333-AFSP or (212) 363-3500
Web: www.afsp.org

American Psychological Association

Telephone: (202) 336-5500 or (800) 374-2721
Web: www.apa.org

AWARE Foundation

Telephone: (215) 955-9847
Web: www.awarefoundation.org

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

Telephone: (800) 826-3632
Web: www.ndmda.org

Kristin Brooks Hope Center

Telephone: (202) 536-3200
The National Hopeline Network: (800) SUICIDE
(784-2433)
Web: www.hopeline.com/

Mental Health America

Telephone: (703) 684-7722 or (800) 969-6642
Web: www.nmha.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Telephone: (703) 524-7600 or (800) 950-NAMI (6264)
Web: www.nami.org

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Telephone: (301) 443-4513 or (866) 615-6464
Web: 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

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Telephone: (877) GET-SPRC (438-7772)
Web: www.sprc.org