

So how do you know if you are seriously depressed or if you just have a case of the common old blues? It's hard to know the difference. Most people think that depression is just being in a bad mood for a long time. If someone says, "I'm depressed", people will ask: "What about?" In reality, depression is more like a feeling of numbness than a feeling of sadness. And while it can be triggered by a particular event like a death, it can also come on for no apparent reason.

Sometimes it seems that no one understands and parents may try to deny the seriousness of the problem. Teens are naturally moody, so it is easy to try to dismiss problems as 'normal teen blues'.

But, it is critical to understand that clinical depression is an extremely serious condition and to realize that teen suicide is becoming increasingly common. 1 in 3 teens has considered suicide. 1 in 12 high school students has attempted it.\*

### **UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION**

#### **CAUSES OF DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE:**

- Teens are subject to many stresses and anxieties that can lead to generalized depression. These can include problems with peers, body image anxiety, low self-esteem, a fear of not being taken seriously and pressures to succeed in school or to obtain acceptable employment.

- Severe depression or suicidal thoughts can occur when these stresses combine with a major loss or failure of some kind in a teen's family, school or social life.
- Major losses can include the break up of a dating relationship, rejection by peers, the death of a family member or close friend or other school or family turmoil.
- Failures can include poor grades, inability to win friends or dates or a specific school, family or personal failure.
- Teens who are at particularly high risk of suicide include those with clinical depression, drug or alcohol abusers, abuse victims and violent or otherwise delinquent teens.
- The greater the combination of stresses, losses or failures, the higher the risk of suicide becomes.

#### **SIGNS OF CLINICAL DEPRESSION:**

- Sadness.
- Lack of interest, sluggishness or complete laziness.
- Disregard for appearance or well being.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Withdrawal from family and possibly also from friends.

#### **HOW TO HELP SOMEONE YOU THINK MAY BE SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION:**

- Be a good friend and listener and make sure they know you care.
- Encourage them to talk about their worries and feelings. Listen...listen...listen!

# LIFE NOTES

## Teen Depression and Suicide

- Even if you think your friend is over-dramatizing, realize that the worry is extremely serious to him or her.
- Reassure them that it is ok to make mistakes sometimes. Point out that we learn more through our failures than we do through our successes.
- Ask a trusted adult for advice in helping your friend. There are always people who care and are concerned for those friends.
- Support them through actions as well as words. Give them a quick hug. Phone them up just to talk about nothing in particular. Pray for them.
- If the depression shows no sign of lifting after a short while, encourage them to go to someone for help.

### RISK SIGNS FOR SUICIDE:

A teen who is at risk for suicide will demonstrate some or all of the signs of clinical depression, but to an even stronger degree.

### Signs may include:

- Overwhelming sadness.
- Increased crying.
- Severe mood swings.
- Loss of appetite.
- Changes in sleep.

- Poor hygiene and a disregard for their well being.
- Withdrawal from family, school and friends.
- Poor grades.
- Delinquent behaviour.

If you recognize these signs in your friend, you should talk to their parents and have them talk to a doctor as soon as possible.

### TREAT AS AN EMERGENCY AND OBTAIN IMMEDIATE CRISIS HELP IF:

- A teen talks about committing suicide or in other ways suggests the act by saying that he or she would be better off dead, etc.
  - OR
- Begins to give away treasured personal possessions.
  - OR
- Writes a suicide note.

### Sources:

\*Gayle Kimball , "The Teen Trip" U.S.

This information has been provided by Shepell•fgi, your LCC Worker Benefits EAP provider. If you are a dependent of an LCC church worker you can call for confidential counseling or advice on this subject::

**1-800-268-5211 (English)**

**1-800-363-3872 (en français)**

**This free service is strictly confidential. You do not need special permission or passwords.**