

Teenage Depression is **REAL**

Contributed by Shawne D. Diaz, MA, LCMHC

LIFE'S RITE OF PASSAGE: teenagers will ride the hormonal roller coaster-its simply a fact. But when adolescents experience long periods of sadness, stop doing activities they enjoy, sleep for long periods of time or go without sleep, over eat, have little energy, experience a loss of concentration, or experience behavioral problems at home or in school; they may be experiencing depression. Other teens may experience headaches, stomachaches, muscle pain, etc. when no physical cause can be found. These are all warning symptoms that they may be experiencing serious depression.

Adolescent depression is real and according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 4% of the nation's teens experience serious depression. It can affect thoughts, feelings, behaviors and overall health. But the good news is that it is treatable.

Some teens get seriously depressed after a intense incident, like a divorce in the family, the death of a loved one, stressful home life, violence, the break up of a boyfriend or girlfriend. They may be experiencing peer pressure, high expectations by parents, abuse, hormonal changes, poor nutrition or an undiagnosed medical condition. Sometimes, depression just happens by itself.

Often times it is hard to tell whether an adolescent is depressed because symptoms may seem like "normal" teenage behavior. But teenagers react to the pain of depression by getting into trouble; trouble with alcohol, drugs, or sex; trouble with school or bad grades; problems with family or friends. That is why it is important to read the warning symptoms and get them the help they need because untreated depression can lead to other issues.

If a teen talks of self-injury or expresses thoughts of death or suicide, seek immediate help by calling 603-668-4079. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in teenagers; depression increases the risk for suicide or suicide attempts.

Depression is an illness and it is not a character flaw or weakness. It is real. Teens can be helped with counseling, provided by a professional psychologist and others may be helped with counseling and medication.

Counseling or more technically speaking, psychotherapy means talking about feelings with a trained mental health professional who can help change relationships, thoughts or behaviors at the root of the depression. Teens treated for depression will begin to feel better soon and can better manage life stresses. For more information about teen depression and treatment or call the Elliot Behavioral Services at 668-4079.

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TIPS TO HELP TEENS WITH DEPRESSION:

- **Listen and be supportive. If your teen shuts you out keep trying, but gently. Most teenagers don't want to be pushed.**
- **Do not criticize or be judgmental once your teen starts to open up.**
- **If the symptoms last more than two weeks do not wait and hope the depression will go away by itself. Seek help from your family doctor or a mental health professional.**
- **Take all talk about self-injury or suicide seriously and get help immediately.**
- **Lastly, having a depressed teenager in the house can be challenging. Parents may also need support from a mental health professional or a group of other parents who have experience with teen depression.**