

TEENAGER'S GUIDE TO DEPRESSION

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR HELPING YOURSELF OR A FRIEND

TEEN DEPRESSION: A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS

The teenage years can be tough, and it's perfectly normal to feel sad or irritable every now and then. But if these feelings don't go away or become so intense that you can't handle them, you may be suffering from depression. The good news is that you don't have to feel this way. Help is available and you have more power than you think. There are many things you can do to help yourself or a friend start feeling better.

WHAT DEPRESSION FEELS LIKE

When you're depressed, it can feel like no one understands. But depression is far more common in teens than you may think. You are not alone and your depression is not a hopeless case. Even though it can feel like depression will never lift, it eventually will—and with proper treatment and healthy choices, that day can come even sooner.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE DEPRESSION	
GIRLS TEND TO:	BOYS TEND TO:
BLAME THEMSELVES	BLAME OTHERS
FEEL SAD, APATHETIC AND WORTHLESS	FEEL ANGRY, IRRITABLE AND EGO-INFLATED
FEEL ANXIOUS AND SCARED	FEEL SUSPICIOUS AND GUARDED
AVOID CONFLICTS AT ALL COSTS	CREATE CONFLICTS
FEEL SLOWED-DOWN AND NERVOUS	FEEL RESTLESS AND AGITATED
HAVE TROUBLE SETTING BOUNDARIES	NEED TO FEEL IN CONTROL AT ALL COSTS
FIND IT EASY TO TALK ABOUT SELF-DOUBT AND DESPAIR	FIND IT "WEAK" TO ADMIT SELF-DOUBT OR DESPAIR
USE FOOD, FRIENDS AND "LOVE" TO SELF-MEDICATE	USE ALCOHOL, TV, SPORTS AND SEX TO SELF-MEDICATE

Adapted from: *Male Menopause* by Jed Diamond

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF TEEN DEPRESSION

It's hard to put into words how depression feels, and people experience it differently. There are, however, some common problems and symptoms that teens with depression experience:

- *You constantly feel irritable, sad, or angry.*
- *Nothing seems fun anymore, and you just don't see the point of trying.*
- *You feel bad about yourself*—worthless, guilty, or just "wrong" in some way

- *You sleep too much or not enough.*
- *You have frequent, unexplained headaches or other physical problems.*
- *Anything and everything makes you cry.*
- *You've gained or lost weight without consciously trying to.*
- *You just can't concentrate.* Your grades may be plummeting because of it.
- *You feel helpless and hopeless.*
- *You're thinking about death or suicide.* (If this is true, talk to someone right away!)

IS YOUR FRIEND DEPRESSED?

If you're a teenager with a friend who seems down or troubled, you may suspect depression. But how do you know it's not just a passing phase or a bad mood?

Look for common warning signs of teen depression:

- *Your friend doesn't want to do the things you guys used to love to do.*
- *Your friend starts using alcohol or drugs or hanging with a bad crowd.*
- *Your friend stops going to classes and after-school activities.*
- *Your friend talks about being bad, ugly, stupid, or worthless.*
- *Your friend starts talking about death or suicide.*

WHEN TEEN DEPRESSION TURNS DEADLY

If your feelings become so overwhelming that you can't see any solution besides harming yourself or others, you need to get help right away. And yet, asking for help when you're in the midst of such strong emotions can be really tough. If talking to a stranger might be easier for you, you can call the following numbers:

HELPLINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz

thelowdown.co.nz – or email team@thelowdown.co.nz or free text 5626 (emails and text messages will be responded to between 12 noon and 12 midnight)

What's Up – 0800 942 8787 (for 5–18 year olds; 1 pm to 11 pm daily)

Kidslife – 0800 54 37 54 (0800 kidsline) aimed at children up to 14 years of age; 4pm to 6pm weekdays

TALKING TO AN ADULT YOU TRUST ABOUT TEEN DEPRESSION

It may seem like there's no way your parents will be able to help, especially if they are always nagging you or getting angry about your behaviour. The truth is, parents hate to see their kids hurting. They may feel frustrated because they don't understand what is going on with you or know how to help.

Many parents don't know enough about depression to recognise it in their own kids, so it may be up to you to educate them. You can refer them to www.helpguide.org or look for further information online. Letting your parents know that you are feeling depressed will probably motivate them to get you the help you need.

If your parents are abusive in any way, or if they have problems of their own that makes it difficult for them to take care of you, find another adult you trust (such as a relative, teacher, counsellor, or coach). This person can either help you approach your parents, or direct you toward the support you need. If you

truly don't have anyone you can talk to, you can text or email The Key to Life Charitable Trust +6421448789, mikeking@keytolife.org.nz

No matter what, talk to someone, especially if you are having any thoughts of harming yourself or others. Asking for help is the bravest thing you can do, and the first step on your way to feeling better.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCEPTING AND SHARING YOUR FEELINGS

It can be hard to open up about how you're feeling—especially when you're feeling depressed, hopeless, ashamed, or worthless. It's important to remember that everyone struggles with feelings like these at one time or another. They don't mean you're weak, fundamentally flawed, or no good. Accepting your feelings and opening up about them with someone you trust will help you feel less alone.

No matter what it feels like, people love and care about you, and if you can muster the courage to talk about your depression, it can—and will—be resolved. Some people think that talking about sad feelings will make them worse, but the opposite is almost always true. It is very helpful to share your worries with someone who will listen and care. They don't need to be able to "fix" you; they just need to be good listeners.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO FEEL BETTER: TIPS FOR DEPRESSED TEENS

Depression is not your fault, and you didn't do anything to cause it. However, you do have some control over feeling better. Staying connected to friends and family, making healthy lifestyle decisions, and keeping stress under control can all have a hugely positive impact on your mood.

In the meantime, you might need therapy or medication to help you while you sort out your feelings. Look into your treatment options with your parents. If medication is being considered, do your research before making a decision, as some antidepressants used for adults can actually make teens feel worse.

TRY NOT TO ISOLATE YOURSELF

When you're depressed, you may not feel like seeing anybody or doing anything. Just getting out of bed in the morning can be difficult, but isolating yourself only makes depression worse. Make it a point to stay social, even if that's the last thing you want to do. As you get out into the world, you may find yourself feeling better.

Spend time with friends, especially those who are active, upbeat, and make you feel good about yourself. Avoid hanging out with those who abuse drugs or alcohol, get you into trouble, or who make you feel insecure. It's also a good idea to limit the time you spend playing video games or surfing online.

KEEP YOUR BODY HEALTHY

Making healthy lifestyle choices can do wonders for your mood. Things like diet and exercise have been shown to help depression. Ever heard of a "runners high"? Exercising releases a rush of endorphins, which makes you feel instantly happier. Physical activity can be as effective as medications or therapy for depression, so get involved in sports, ride your bike, or take a dance class. Any activity helps! Even a short walk can be beneficial.

As for food, an improper diet can make you feel sluggish and tired, which worsens depression symptoms. Your body needs vitamins and minerals such as iron and B-vitamins. Make sure you're feeding your mind with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Talk to your parents, doctor or school nurse about how to ensure your diet is adequately nutritious.



PAVING THE WAY TO A BRIGHTER NEW ZEALAND



AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

You may be tempted to drink or use drugs in an effort to escape from your feelings and get a “mood boost,” even if just for a short time. However, substance use can not only make depression worse, but can cause you to become depressed in the first place. Alcohol and drug use can also increase suicidal feelings. In short, drinking and taking drugs will make you feel worse—not better—in the long run.

If you’re addicted to alcohol or drugs, seek help. You will need special treatment for your substance problem on top of whatever treatment you’re receiving for your depression.

ASK FOR HELP IF YOU’RE STRESSED

Stress and worry can take a big toll, even leading to depression. Talk to a teacher or school counsellor if exams or classes seem overwhelming. Likewise, if you have a health concern you feel you can’t talk to your parents about—such as a pregnancy scare or drug problem—seek medical attention at a clinic or see a doctor. A health professional can help you approach your parents (if that is required) and guide you toward appropriate treatment. Your GP may be able to refer you to funded counselling through their primary mental health programme, so

always ask if that is available. If you’re dealing with relationship, friendship, or family problems, talk to an adult you trust. Your school may have a counsellor you can go to for help, or you may want to ask your parents to make an appointment for you to see a therapist.

HELPING A DEPRESSED FRIEND

Depressed teens typically rely on their friends more than their parents or other adults in their lives, so you may find yourself in the position of being the first—or only—person that they talk to about their feelings. While this might seem like a huge responsibility, there are many things you can do to help.

- **Get your friend to talk to you.** Starting a conversation about depression can be daunting, but you can say something simple: “You seem like you are really down, and not yourself. I really want to help you. Is there anything I can do?”
- **Know that your friend doesn’t expect you to have the answers.** Your friend probably just needs someone to listen and be supportive. By listening and responding in a non-judgmental and reassuring manner, you are helping in a major way.

- **Encourage your friend to get help.** Urge your depressed friend to talk to a parent, teacher, or counsellor. It might be scary for your friend to admit to an authority figure that there is a problem. Having you there might help, so offer to go along for support.
- **Stick with your friend through the hard times.** Depression can make people do and say things that are hurtful or strange. But your friend is going through a very difficult time, so try not to take it personally. Once your friend gets help, he or she will go back to being the person you know and love. In the meantime, make sure you have other friends or family taking care of you. Your feelings are important and need to be respected, too.
- **Speak up if your friend is suicidal.** If your friend is joking or talking about suicide, giving possessions away, or saying goodbye, tell a trusted adult immediately. Your only responsibility at this point is to get your friend help, and get it fast. Even if you promised not to tell, your friend needs your help. It’s better to have a friend who is temporarily angry at you than one who is no longer alive.

Credit www.helpguide.org



The Key To Life Charitable Trust

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