

# Let's Talk About Depression



A guide for teenagers

Distributed by  
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# Let's Talk About

# Depression

Sure, everybody feels sad or blue now and then. But if you're sad most of the time, and it's giving you problems with

- your grades or attendance at school
- your relationships with your family and friends
- alcohol, drugs, or sex
- controlling your behavior in other ways

**the problem may be DEPRESSION.**

The good news is that you can get treatment and **feel better soon.**

Approximately 4% of adolescents get seriously depressed each year. Clinical depression is a serious illness that can affect anybody, **including teenagers.** It can affect your thoughts, feelings, behavior, and overall health.

Most people with depression can be helped with treatment. But a majority of depressed people never get the help they need. And, when depression isn't treated, it can get worse, last longer, and prevent you from getting the most out of this important time in your life.

## So....Listen Up:

Here's how to tell if you or a friend might be depressed.



First, there are two kinds of depressive illness: the sad kind, called major depression, and manic-depression or bipolar disorder, when feeling down and depressed alternates with being speeded-up and sometimes reckless.

You should get evaluated by a professional if you've had five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks or if any of these symptoms cause such a big change that you can't keep up your usual routine.....

## When You're Depressed...

- You feel sad or cry a lot and it doesn't go away.
- You feel guilty for no reason; you feel like you're no good; you've lost your confidence.
- Life seems meaningless or like nothing good is ever going to happen again. You have a negative attitude a lot of the time, or it seems like you have no feelings.
- You don't feel like doing a lot of the things you used to like—like music, sports, being with friends, going out—and you want to be left alone most of the time.

- It's hard to make up your mind. You forget lots of things, and it's hard to concentrate.
- You get irritated often. Little things make you lose your temper; you over-react.
- Your sleep pattern changes; you start sleeping a lot more or you have trouble falling asleep at night. Or you wake up really early most mornings and can't get back to sleep.
- Your eating pattern changes; you've lost your appetite or you eat a lot more.
- You feel restless and tired most of the time.
- You think about death, or feel like you're dying, or have thoughts about committing suicide.

## When You're Manic...

- You're rebellious or irritable and can't get along at home or school, or with your friends.
- You feel high as a kite...like you're "on top of the world."
- You get unreal ideas about the great things you can do...things that you really can't do.
- Thoughts go racing through your head, you jump from one subject to another, and you talk a lot.
- You're a non-stop party, constantly running around.
- You do too many wild or risky things: with driving, with spending money, with sex, etc.
- You're so "up" that you don't need much sleep.

## Talk to Someone

If you are concerned about depression in yourself or a friend, **TALK TO SOMEONE** about it. There are people who can help you get treatment:

- a professional at a mental health center or Mental Health Association
- a trusted family member
- your family doctor
- your clergy
- a school counselor or nurse
- a social worker
- a responsible adult

Or, if you don't know where to turn, the telephone directory or information operator should have phone numbers for a local hotline or mental health services or referrals.

Depression can affect people of any age, race, ethnic or economic group.

## Let's Get Serious Here

Having depression doesn't mean that a person is weak, or a failure, or isn't really trying...it means they need **treatment**.

Most people with depression can be helped with **psychotherapy, medicine, or both together**.

Short-term **psychotherapy**, means talking about feelings with a trained professional who can help you change the relationships, thoughts, or behaviors that contribute to depression.

**Medication** has been developed that effectively treats depression that is severe or disabling. Antidepressant medications are not "uppers" and are not addictive.

Sometimes, several types may have to be tried before you and your doctor find the one that works best.

Treatment can help most depressed people start to feel better in just a few weeks.

So remember, when your problems seem too big and you're feeling low for too long, **you are not alone**. There's help out there and you can ask for help. And if you know someone who you think is depressed, **you can help**: Listen and encourage your friend to ask a parent or responsible adult about treatment. If your friend doesn't ask for help soon, talk to an adult you trust and respect—especially if your friend mentions suicide.

## What You Need to Know About Suicide...

Most people who are depressed do not commit suicide. But depression increases the risk for suicide or suicide attempts. It is not true that people who talk about suicide do not attempt it. Suicidal thoughts, remarks, or attempts are **ALWAYS SERIOUS**...if any of these happen to you or a friend, you must tell a responsible adult **IMMEDIATELY**...it's better to be safe than sorry....

## Why Do People Get Depressed?

Sometimes people get seriously depressed after something like a divorce in the family, major financial problems, someone you love dying, a messed up home life, or breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Other times—like with other illnesses—depression just happens. Often 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. This is another reason why it's important to get treatment for depression before it leads to other trouble.

## Depression and Alcohol and Other Drugs

A lot of depressed people, especially teenagers, also have problems with alcohol or other drugs. (Alcohol is a drug, too.) Sometimes the depression comes first and people try drugs as a way to escape it. (In the long run, drugs or alcohol just make things worse!) Other times, the alcohol or other drug use comes first, and depression is caused by:

- the drug itself, or
- withdrawal from it, or
- the problems that substance use causes.

And sometimes you can't tell which came first...the important point is that when you have both of these problems, the sooner you get treatment, the better. Either problem can make the other worse and lead to bigger trouble, like addiction or flunking school. You need to be honest about both problems—first with yourself and then with someone who can help you get into treatment...it's the only way to really get better and stay better.

Depression is a real  
medical illness  
and it's treatable.

## Be Able to Tell Fact From Fiction

Myths about depression often prevent people from doing the right thing. Some common myths are:

*Myth:* It's normal for teenagers to be moody; teens don't suffer from "real" depression. **FACT: Depression is more than just being moody, and it can affect people at any age, including teenagers.**

*Myth:* Telling an adult that a friend might be depressed is betraying a trust. If someone wants help, he or she will get it. **FACT: Depression, which saps energy and self-esteem, interferes with a person's ability or wish to get help. It is an act of true friendship to share your concerns with an adult who can help.**

*Myth:* Talking about depression only makes it worse. **FACT: Talking through feelings with a good friend is often a helpful first step. Friendship, concern, and support can provide the encouragement to talk to a parent or other trusted adult about getting evaluated for depression.**

## For Additional Information About Depression Write To:

6001 Executive Boulevard, Room  
8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

For free brochures on depression and its treatment, call: 1-800-421-4211.

## For More Information About NIMH

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## About Lucy MacDonald

Lucy MacDonald, M.Ed., a Canadian author, has been a counselor in private practice for the last five years and is certified with the Canadian Counselling Association. Lucy has a Master of Education degree from McGill University with an undergraduate degree in Psychology from Concordia University.

In addition to her private practice, Lucy is an [accomplished speaker](#), working in private industry, government, academic and nonprofit organizations. Lucy's clients include Kraft Canada, Pfizer, Investors Group, McGill University and Concordia University. Lucy is known for her engaging, dynamic and straightforward speaking style, along with her sense of humor.

Lucy's first book, [Learn to be an Optimist](#) was commissioned by Duncan Baird Publishers in London, England in December of 2002. In [Learn to be an Optimist](#), a positive thinking self-help book, Lucy takes a practical and insightful approach to helping you increase your optimism and suggests realistic ways to transform daily living by developing a positive attitude. Learn to be an Optimist contains positive thinking tips,

Lucy is the author and presenter of a variety of seminars including *The Power of Optimism*, *Discover Your Life Purpose*, *Manage Your Stress Before Your Stress Manages You*, and *Understanding Burnout*.

Lucy is the parent of four children ages 20 to 30 and lives in Beaconsfield, Quebec, Canada.

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