

# Teenager's Guide to Depression

## Tips and Tools for Helping Yourself or a Friend

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.

## 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 afterschool activities.

- Your friend talks about being bad, ugly, stupid, or worthless.
- Your friend starts talking about death or suicide.

## When teen depression turns deadly

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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, call **1-800-273-TALK** in the U.S. to speak in confidence to someone who can understand and help you deal with your feelings.

## Coping With Suicidal Thoughts

In the meantime, the following suggestions can help get you through until you feel ready to talk to someone:

- **There is ALWAYS another solution, even if you can't see it right now.** Many kids who have attempted suicide (and survived) say that they did it because they mistakenly felt there was no other solution to a problem they were experiencing. At the time, they could not see another way out, but in truth, they didn't really want to die. Remember that no matter how horribly you feel, these emotions will pass.
- **Having thoughts of hurting yourself or others does not make you a bad person.** Depression can make you think and feel things that are out of character. No one should judge you or condemn you for these feelings if you are brave enough to talk about them.
- **If your feelings are uncontrollable, tell yourself to wait 24 hours before you take any action.** This can give you time to really think things through and give yourself some distance from the strong emotions that are plaguing you. During this 24-hour period, try to talk to someone—anyone—as long as they are not another suicidal or depressed person. Call a hotline or talk to a friend. What do you have to lose?
- **If you're afraid you can't control yourself, make sure you are never alone.** Even if you can't verbalize your feelings, just stay in public places, hang out with friends or family members, or go to a movie—anything to keep from being by yourself and in danger.

**Help is available.** Remember, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. **All you need to do is take that first step and reach out.**

Reference: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm#>