

Depression: What It Is and How To Deal With It

By Kesha Lane

My name is depression. I can strike at any moment in time. I make people feel worthless, unwanted, unneeded, confused, and full of despair. As you try to get rid of me, I cause feelings of frustration, hate, and anger to arise in you. I can drain you until there is nothing left except a hollow shell. Leaving you with nothing except suicidal thoughts, if you let me. I am nobody's friend....except death's.

Depression varies in degrees and intensity, and has been a recurring factor in human life for ages. Increasingly, young people are becoming afflicted by it.

June Mann, executive director of Samaritans, a counseling hotline for people with emotional problems, said, "There are different types of depression, so there is no one definition. Depression is not abnormal. It becomes such when it starts to interfere with a major part of your life."

She said the difference between depression and just plain sadness that everyone feels "is its interference with your regular behavior."

Francine Klagsburn states in the book "Too Young to Die—Youth and Suicide": "At the root of many emotionally caused depressions lies a profound sense of loss, of someone or something that has been deeply loved."

A SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS

Sometimes a young person feels that no one cares and becomes painfully depressed. "This stage of adolescence is a test of all kinds of behavior," stated Deborah O'Neil, supervisor of mental health at the Door, a multi-service youth program in Manhattan.

Not having an adult's exposure to life's trial and error process, we young people have a hard time handling the ups and downs of life.

Ms. O'Neil stated that someone can become depressed by "a change in their life that they feel powerless to do anything about."

"Some can deal with these changes and some can't," stated Miss Mann.



Depression or mood swings can be caused by a variety of factors, such as: pressure to use drugs or have sex, lack of parental communication, the death of a loved one, the change from junior high school to high school, or a breakup with a boy or girlfriend. These kinds of problems can leave you at a mental low.

Ms. O'Neil said that as simple a decision such as what to wear every day can cause depression.

A young person can also be faced with diverse family problems, such as simple rejection by a parent caught up in his or her lifestyle or problems, or more devastating ones: divorce, a parent's remarriage, alcoholism, incest, wife beating, child abuse, or a parent on crack. All are prime causes of depression in children.

The most heartbreaking thing to a young person is the loss of love, the feeling of being unwanted and uncared for.

WARNING SIGNS

"I used to do things to get my mother's attention, like cut my fingers with a piece of glass and then run in the house...for sympathy or 'love.' I always wanted her to love me," revealed a young woman who we will call Sydney. "I felt pushed away when she would yell at me for something I did wrong. I always had the need to feel loved."

It is important to recognize the warning signs before they become the symptoms that lead to deep depression or, in extreme cases, suicide.

Anyone may suffer temporarily from one or more of these symptoms without having a serious problem. It is when these symptoms persist, however, that notice should be taken.

An added problem is that some young people try to hide their symptoms because of fear that an adult might say, "What are you depressed about? You have a lot to be thankful for."

Symptoms of depression include: sexual promiscuity, vandalism, heavy drinking, and the like.

Ms. O'Neil said another symptom of depression is a "lack of care in personal appearance. They tend to look bummy," or unkempt.

Sydney continued: "You may be overtired. You withdraw socially and feel 'I do not like being bothered with people, they don't like me.'"

Sydney said she had experienced changes in her eating habits when she became depressed—she either overate or stopped eating.

"I could not concentrate," she said. "You go over and over certain thoughts or you read without comprehension."

"You seem to always have aches and pains. Headaches, backaches, footaches, cramps, and pains in the abdomen and chest constantly. You feel tired for no good reason."

Sydney said that guilt contributed to her depression. "You begin to think 'I can never be forgiven for my actions.' The worst thing to do is lay a guilt trip on yourself. That's what can bring you to rock bottom where there can be no return."

SEEKING HELP

How can you nip depression in the bud before it interferes with your life?

A counselor or therapist can go a long way in helping you deal with your problems. Don't be afraid or ashamed to seek psychiatric help. Drugs can also be prescribed.

For the minor cases, the best way to get out of the rut is to get busy and find a positive outlet, such as dancing, bicycle riding, jogging, or maybe volunteer work.

If you can't find an outlet for yourself, be one for someone else. Help that person with cooking and cleaning at home.

For some, prayer or just talking out your feelings with a friend, parent, or parents, can help. If you just can't talk to them, anonymous hotlines are available.

There are ways to break free from depression, so get busy. Have a positive attitude about yourself and win your fight with melancholy.

Even though this article will not prevent you from getting depressed, it should help you become aware that you are not alone and there is help. See the box on this page for some organizations that can be of assistance.