

# Take Yourself Seriously When You Get Depressed

*Sandy hadn't been able to shake her dark mood. It started when Brian broke up with her. That was almost 2 months ago. All she wants to do is sleep—in fact, sometimes she wishes she'd never wake up. That would be easier than facing him at school every day.*

When you lose someone or something—a boyfriend, a parent, or friends through changing schools—feeling bad is a natural response. Depression—which is just anger, turned inward—is a normal reaction to change and stress. Everyone feels it.

It is also a fairly common experience for teenagers to think of hurting themselves when they are depressed. The fact that Sandy feels this way ("I wish I'd never wake up" is a self-destructive thought) does not mean that she is crazy.

But it does mean something. It is a message from herself to herself that something in her life needs to be changed. She needs to take her thoughts of hurting herself seriously.

And she needs to talk to someone—a friend, a family member, a trusted adult—about her problems.

Why? Because she's depressed. And depression can sometimes be dangerous.

Seriously depressed people often turn to thoughts of suicide. Suicides aren't something that happens to "other persons." Although at one time or another most of us think about suicide, some do more than think about it.

Among 15- to 24-year-olds, suicide is the third leading cause of death, right behind traffic accidents and homicides. There are over 400,000 suicide attempts each year in this age group, and over 5,000 teens will "succeed."<sup>\*</sup>

Suicide attempts are more common among women. Women like Sandy account for 90% of suicide attempts. But young men are more likely to actually kill themselves—three times as likely as women.

It takes two things to trigger a suicide attempt:

- **A bad event.** The teenager experiences a normal loss in his or her life. We say "normal" because it is normal to have

<sup>\*</sup>This is the figure for 1978, the last year for which data are available from the National Center for Health Statistics. Information on under-15-year-olds is not included because it is not considered accurate. (There are probably a lot more suicides than are reported, because parents and physicians tend to put another cause of death down on the death certificate.)

losses and disappointments in life. Most people get upset or blue at such times, but most will get over it.

- **Isolation.** Instead of talking over her problem with someone, Sandy went off by herself and brooded over it. Although being alone and "licking our wounds" is what we often feel like doing most when we are upset, it is the most dangerous thing we can do. Because isolation feeds depression.

Sandy is showing several of the following signs of severe depression:

- Feeling blue or sad; thinking bad thoughts about yourself
- Loss of appetite
- Trouble with sleep (either sleeping too much or having insomnia)
- Self-punishing or self-destructive thoughts ("I've had it"; "Everybody would be better off without me")
- Abrupt personality change (a shy person becoming clownish; an outgoing one becoming withdrawn)
- Declining school performance and apathy.

Sandy has been having these symptoms for 2 months. That is another signal that she needs immediate help.

**WHEN SYMPTOMS LAST MORE THAN A COUPLE OF WEEKS, YOU MAY NEED HELP.**

## Will Her Friends Reject Her?

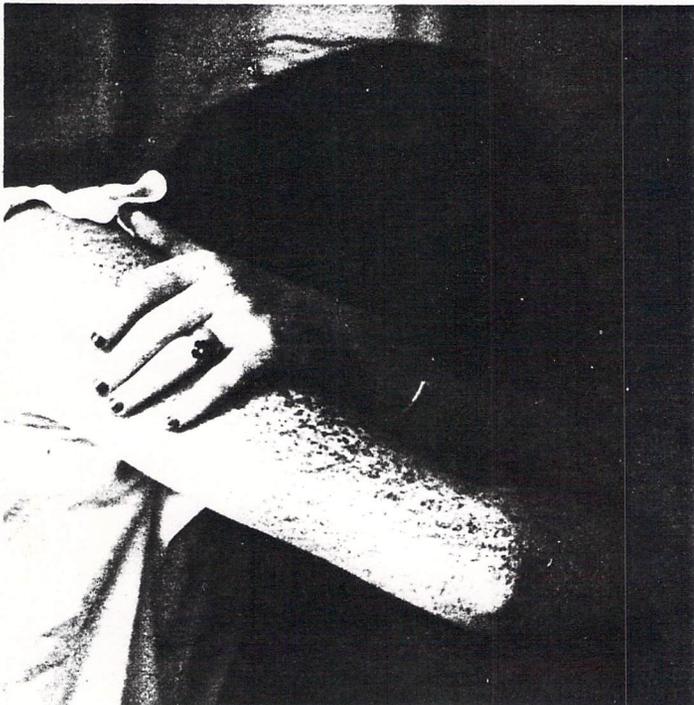
Sandy needs to talk to someone, but she's finding this difficult. When she and Brian first broke up, her friends and parents did try to talk to her about it, but she just felt like sulking then. She didn't want to talk.

When her friends and family felt that their sympathy wasn't appreciated, they backed off a little, so Sandy felt like they withdrew from her too. That has made her feel even worse. She feels they have been avoiding her.

This is a very common situation among depressed people. But Sandy needs to reach out for help despite her feelings. Her friends and family will probably be more than willing to listen now—all they ever wanted to do was help her over her troubles.

But she can't face them right now, she needs to talk to someone—even if it is just a suicide hotline. (That number is with the emergency ones in the introductory pages of most phone books.) If you're depressed, just take that first step and reach out to someone. You needn't try to face your problems alone when there are so many people ready and willing to help!

*Why Do Teens Commit Suicide?*  
See page 49.



If you think of hurting yourself, take it seriously. Don't withdraw. Do talk to someone about your problem.