

# Solon Community Action Team

## Parent Tip Sheet #3: Depression in Childhood & Adolescence

### General Information

1. Children & adolescents are just as susceptible to depression as adults.
2. Depression commonly appears for the first time in people 15-19 years of age. But, it may begin in childhood as well.
3. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of cases of depression that begin in childhood & adolescence.
4. Surveys have revealed that as many as 20% of high school students are deeply unhappy or have some kind of psychiatric problem.
5. The rate of suicide among teens has tripled in the last 30 years.

### Symptoms

1. The symptoms of depression in children & adolescents can be similar to those experienced by depressed adults.
2. However, certain symptoms are more likely to appear in younger people & depression in children & adolescents may be disguised by unhealthy behaviors.
3. Depression in children & adolescents includes a cluster of symptoms which have been present for more than 2 weeks:

- ?? **Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying**
- ?? **Hopelessness**
- ?? **Persistent boredom, lack of enthusiasm, energy, or motivation**
- ?? **Decreased interest in activities**
- ?? **Social withdrawal or isolation**
- ?? **Confusion or difficulty with decisions; poor concentration**
- ?? **Increased irritability, anger, or hostility**
- ?? **Difficulty with relationships**
- ?? **Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school**
- ?? **Major change in eating or sleeping patterns**
- ?? **Low self-esteem or guilt**
- ?? **Drug and/or alcohol abuse**
- ?? **Problems with authority**
- ?? **Talks of or efforts to run away from home**
- ?? **Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior**

### Who Gets Depressed?

1. Depression usually results from a combination of factors.
2. Various life stresses can contribute to depression:
  - ?? **Experiences of failure**
  - ?? **Alienation by peers**
  - ?? **Any kind of abuse**
  - ?? **Physical illness**
  - ?? **Extreme pressure to achieve**
  - ?? **Family problems that damage children or teenagers' self-esteem or make them feel unloved**

?? Unresolved grief - due to the death of a loved one, loss of a close friend, or break-up of a love relationship

3. There is an increased risk of depressive illness in children of parents with significant depression.
4. Depression may be caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.
4. Drugs & alcohol are often implicated in the development of depression in people of all ages.

#### Approaches to Treatment

1. Treatment is individualized & may involve a combination of approaches.
2. The first step is to contact a professional for advice and help (See below).
3. Medications are believed to work by increasing the supply of neurotransmitters in the brain to restore the chemical balance.
4. Counseling or psychotherapy is almost always helpful for a depressed person.
5. Counseling may be individual, family, or group.

#### How Can Friends & Family Help?

1. Be alert for the signs of depression in children & adolescents you know.
2. If you suspect a child or adolescent is depressed, or might be depressed, encourage the child or teen to talk about his/her feelings.
3. Seek help - see resources below.
4. Support the child or teen with plenty of patience, caring, and understanding.
5. Parents should not blame themselves for their child's clinical depression. It is a real medical illness just like diabetes or cancer.

#### Resources

1. Local - family doctor, clergyman, school counselor or nurse, mental health professional, social worker, Cuyahoga County 24 Hour Mental Health Hotline (216-623-6888), First Call for Help (216-436-2000), & National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Metro Cleveland (216-491-1616).
2. Internet
  - a. National Institute of Mental Health -[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)\*\*
  - b. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry - [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org) \*\*
  - c. The Center for Mental Health Services - [www.mentalhealth.org](http://www.mentalhealth.org)
  - d. National Alliance for the Mentally Ill - [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
  - e. National Mental Health Association - [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)
  - f. National Depressive & Manic-Depressive Association [www.ndmda.org](http://www.ndmda.org)

3. Pamphlet: Depression & Adolescents: Recognizing the Signs of Depression and Taking Steps to Help. Jefferson, J. MD & Greist, J. MD. 1993. Pfizer, Inc. \*\*

\*\*Source for this tip sheet. Content reviewed by: Carol Musil PhD RN, Associate Professor, Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, Case Western Reserve University

Next Parent Tip Sheet: Suicide in Children & Adolescents

Previous Tip Sheets: Alcohol Use by Solon Youth & Use of Tobacco by Solon Youth

CAT Parent Tip Sheets are available from: Debbie Lindell, President Solon CAT, 349-1275

