

Adolescent Depression

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It is common for teens to experience depression. Researchers have found that up to one in eight youth experience some form of depression during their teenage years. It is also well known that all adolescents face many unique challenges related to school, finding a college, peer pressure, and hormones, which may result periods of sadness, frustration, and despair; however, depression is more than just feeling sad or not being happy, depression is a serious mental condition different from typical adolescent experiences.

Youth experiencing adolescent depression, also referred to as teen depression, often have severe periods of sadness, hopelessness, or other symptoms lasting prolonged periods of time. Although symptoms of teen depression are different for everyone, the symptoms typically last most of the day and occur almost every day. Some of the most common symptoms of depression include: (a) feeling worthless, (b) feelings of frustration, even without a cause, (c) an outlook that the future is hopeless, (d) a loss of interest in activities you typically enjoy, (d) tiredness, insomnia, or weight loss, (d) feeling socially isolated or thinking no one likes you, and (e) thoughts of suicide or frequently thinking about death.

Teens may experience depression for varying reasons. For example, some adolescents will experience depression for genetic or biological reasons. When depression is caused by biological factors, it is typically because neurotransmitters are

not working properly. Neurotransmitters are chemicals that deliver messages in the brain and help regulate emotions. Additionally, adolescents who have family members with a history of depression are more likely to experience depression. Other teens may experience depression because of traumatic life experiences, such as witnessing or experience a violent event or prolonged periods of stress. Furthermore, depression can be caused by the use of prescription drugs, recreational drugs, or other forms substance abuse.

The term depression is often used to describe a wide array of emotional issues, and there are many different forms of depression. Adolescent depression is a term used to specifically describe youth experiencing depression, but typically it is similar to adult depression. Additionally, people may be diagnosed with major depressive disorder, persistent depressive disorder, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, substance/medication-induced depressive disorder, and depression caused by other medical condition or unspecified. Previously, bipolar disorder was considered a form of depression because people experiencing bipolar disorder have some symptoms similar to depression, but it is now considered a separate disorder. As noted earlier, the symptoms vary for everyone experiencing depression, and the different diagnosis help clarify the types of treatments that youth require. For instance, premenstrual dysphoric disorder occurs in women the week before menses and should be absent a week after, which requires different treatment. Lastly, depression does not have to occur in isolation, and adolescents may experience other mental disorders while also experiencing symptoms of depression.

Adolescent depression is not something for youth to be ashamed of, and youth should be encouraged to share their feelings and seek professional treatment. Teens

experiencing depression may not always have symptoms and may appear to be better; however, depression often comes back and will likely continue to do so regularly. The risks of leaving depression untreated are numerous. Adolescents experiencing depression can experience severe weight loss, loss of interest in school, work and relationships, or suicide attempts. Estimations range, but it is thought that up to 500,000 teens attempt suicide every year. If a teen is experiencing depression, they should be encouraged to speak to a friend or family member they trust and seek treatment from trained mental health professionals.

Adolescents seeking treatment from trained mental health professionals have a multitude of treatment options. The most common forms of treatment include medication and psychotherapy, also known as talk therapy. When doctors believe a teen is experiencing depression would benefit from medication, there are several forms of antidepressants they can choose from that have been tested on teens and have shown effectiveness. Talk therapy can occur with a psychiatrist, psychologists, social workers, counselors or other trained therapists. During talk therapy, adolescents can share their thoughts with a supportive adult that will help them focus on changing their thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Additionally, teens experiencing depression are encouraged to also focus on their physical health.

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Further Readings

Jeffreys, M., & Weersing, V. R. (2014). Depressive disorders in adolescents. In C. A.

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Mental Health America - <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

National Institute on Mental Health – <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>