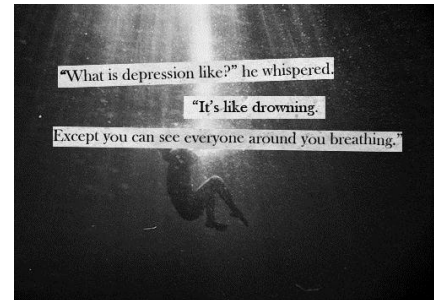


# Teen Depression

## Let's Break the Silence and Kill the Stigma: Depression is not a LOSER'S DISEASE!

Teenage depression is a serious problem which manifests as more than just bad moods and affects all areas of a teen's life. It may lead to substance use and abuse, self-loathing, self-mutilation, pregnancy, violence and suicide in teens. Often adults are unsettled by a teen's depression and believe that the teen should just 'get over it'. We do not always realise that the maladaptive behaviour that we observe stems from a serious, life-threatening illness that needs treatment. Depression can destroy a teen's sense of identity, their personality and results in an overwhelming sense of sadness, despair and anger. Depression is highly treatable, but only 1 in 5 depressed teens receive help. They rely on parents or other adults to recognise their suffering and get them the help they need.



### What are the Effects of Teen Depression?

Teenage depression is sometimes misunderstood and labelled as 'acting out', but unhealthy behaviours are almost always a cry for help. The question remains whether we, as adults, will recognise this and respond. Look out for the following:

- **Problems at school**
- **Running away**
- **Substance abuse**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Internet addiction**
- **Reckless behaviour**
- **Violence**
- **Eating disorders and self-injury**

“The three main features of depression, whether in children or adults, are feeling unlovable, feeling that you are worthless and feeling as though you have no control over relationships.”  
— Dr. Kevin Stark

### So, what can we do?

Talking about the problem and offering support are good places to start. We also need to be able to identify the signs and symptoms.

### Signs and Symptoms of Depression in Teens

Often, teens with depression will have a noticeable change in their thinking and behaviour. They may have no motivation and even become withdrawn, closing their bedroom door after school and staying in their room for hours. They may sleep excessively, have a change in eating habits, and may even exhibit criminal behaviours such as shoplifting.

Here are more signs of depression in adolescents even though they may or may not show all signs:

- Sadness, anxiety or hopelessness
- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Tearfulness or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Use of substances and promiscuity
- Drop in grades
- Loss of interest in food and weight loss
- Restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and excessive guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating / loss of memory
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Apathy
- Rebellious / reckless behaviour
- Compulsive overeating & weight gain

## What is the Difference between Teenage and Adult Depression?

Depression in teens can look very different from depression in adults. The following symptoms of depression are more common in teenagers:

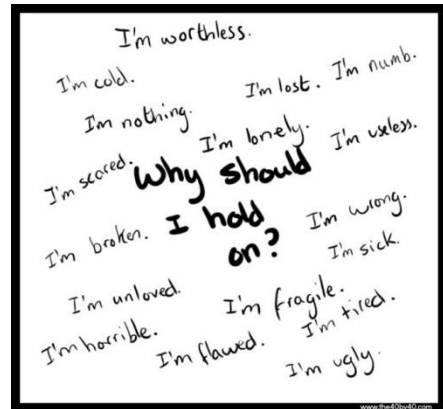
- **Irritable or angry mood**
- **Unexplained aches and pains** – headaches or stomach aches without medical cause.
- **Extreme sensitivity to criticism**
- **Withdrawing from some, but not all people**

## Suicide: The Teen Killer

In South Africa suicide currently accounts for **9.5% of teen deaths**. Immediate action must be taken if you suspect suicidal tendencies. Even though many teens may think about, speak about or make attempts, an alarming number of teens are successful. So, whether it seems like attention-seeking behaviour or a so-called 'serious threat', suicidal tendencies require IMMEDIATE ACTION.

## Suicide Warning Signs in Depressed Teens

- Talking or joking about committing suicide
- Saying things like, "I'd be better off dead," "I wish I could disappear forever," or "There's no way out."
- Speaking positively about death or romanticizing dying ("If I died, people might love me more")
- Writing stories and poems about death, dying, or suicide
- Engaging in reckless behaviour or having a lot of accidents resulting in injury
- Giving away prized possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family as if for the last time
- Seeking out weapons, pills, or other ways to kill themselves



## Again, what can we do?

Address the issue in a loving, non-judgmental way, communicate your concerns with your child, and encourage them to open up. Trust your instincts. Denial is a strong emotion and teens find it difficult to talk about their emotions. Offer support, be persistent, and listen without lecturing. Validate their feelings – simply acknowledge that their feelings are important and real.

Depression is very damaging when left untreated, so don't wait and hope that the symptoms will go away. If you see depression's warning signs, seek professional help.

Make an immediate appointment for your teen to see the family doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist.

***Depression responds best to early intervention and treatment!***

**CONSULT OUR LIST OF RECOMMENDED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE.**

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