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# Dealing With Depression



**Y**ou used to want to spend time with friends. Now you spend most of your time alone. You used to enjoy activities like sports and music. Now nothing interests you. You used to look forward to the future. Now you don't even want to face today.

Do these things describe you? Then you could be suffering from depression. More than sadness, depression is an illness that strikes about one in 10 adolescents. But until recently, most doctors didn't know much about how this illness affects children.

Now they do. They know that depression can be treated. But if depression isn't treated, it can get worse and can lead to many serious problems. Here are the facts you need to know about depression.

## What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad. Everyone has sad feelings. But when those sad feelings won't go away ... when they don't have any obvious cause ... and when they significantly interfere with everyday life, they may be the illness called depression.

That's right—depression is an illness. And just like other illnesses, it affects your entire body, not just your mind. Depression affects people of all ages, all races and all levels of society.

Doctors can treat this illness. Yet more than half the people with depression don't get proper medical treatment. That can be dangerous. When depression isn't treated, it is the leading cause of alcoholism, drug abuse and other addictions. Untreated depression is also the number one cause of suicide.

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### Here's what depression is not

- Depression is not something to be ashamed of.
- Depression is not the same as feeling sad or “down” sometimes.
- Depression is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness.
- Depression isn't a mood. It's not something you can “snap out of.” (You wouldn't tell someone with heart disease to “Just snap out of it.”)



# What are the signs of depression?

- Your persistent mood is sad, anxious or “empty.”
- You feel hopeless and pessimistic.
- You feel guilty, worthless or helpless.
- You’ve lost interest in the hobbies and activities you once enjoyed.
- You can’t sleep or you sleep all the time. You may awaken in the middle of the night and not be able to go back to sleep.
- You have no appetite and you’ve lost weight. Or you seem to be gaining weight without trying.
- You have no energy. You feel like you’re constantly in slow motion.
- You’re constantly restless and irritable. (You’re not the only one who’s noticed—your parents, friends or teachers may also have said something.)
- You have trouble concentrating and making decisions.
- You have thoughts about death or suicide. You may have attempted suicide. If this is the case, get help right away. Talk to your parents, your doctor or a trusted teacher.

## So I may have depression ... Now what?

**R**emember, depression is an illness that’s not going to go away by itself. You need help. Start by talking with your parents. Tell them you think you have depression and you need help.

Your parents may be relieved to hear you say these words. They may have worried that something was wrong, but they weren’t sure. They’ll probably take you to a doctor or a counselor to try to get you some help.

But what if your parents don’t know what to do or where to go so you can get treatment? Then you might talk with your school counselor or your doctor. They might suggest:

- **Counseling for you.** It can help to talk about your problems. Counselors are trained to help you work through issues and learn how to deal with them.
- **Counseling for your whole family.** Your depression can affect everyone at home. And depression *does* tend to run in families.
- **Group counseling with other kids.** Especially if your depression is caused by something like illness or a family divorce, it can be really helpful to talk with other kids going through the same thing. In some schools, a support group may meet during the lunch hour or after school.
- **Medication.** Your doctor may prescribe special medication. Remember, depression is an illness, so there’s nothing wrong with taking a medication your doctor prescribes. Just don’t share the medication with others.

## A special warning

**W**hen depression isn’t treated, it can lead kids to take their own lives. Perhaps you have been thinking that the only way to solve your problems is to end your life.

If you’re having these feelings, *help is available and you need to ask for it right away.* Don’t wait. Depression doesn’t simply go away. And when you’re suffering from depression, you don’t have very good judgment. So you may think a problem can’t be solved, when it’s really something you can fix once you’re thinking more clearly.

Suicide is *never* the answer. Your mom and dad need to know if you’re having these feelings. If you can’t tell them, tell a counselor, a teacher, your doctor or a religious leader.

And if a friend tells you he’s thinking about suicide, you have a duty to tell an adult right away. Suicide is serious, and it’s not something kids can handle on their own.

### Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States.

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