The first step toward deleting depression is to define it. But people who are depressed often have a hard time thinking clearly or recognizing their own symptoms. They may need your help. Listed below are possible symptoms of depression. Any combination of these symptoms persisting longer than two weeks would be reason to be concerned.

Do they express feelings of:
- sadness or emptiness?
- hopelessness, pessimism or guilt?
- helplessness or worthlessness?
- chronic aches / pains in joints and muscles?

Do they have difficulty:
- making decisions?
- concentrating and remembering?
- with sleeping or weight?

Have they:
- lost interest or pleasure in activities?
- appeared more restless or irritable?
- abused alcohol or other drugs?

You know that these school years can be complicated and demanding. Deep down, you are not quite sure of who you are, what you want to be, or whether the choices you make from day to day are the best decisions.

Sometimes the many changes and pressures you are facing threaten to overwhelm you. So it is not surprising that from time to time you or one of your friends feel “down” or discouraged.

But what about those times when a friend’s activity and outlook on life stay “down” for weeks and begin to affect your relationship? If you know someone like this, your friend might be suffering from depression. As a friend, you can help.
Q. Are all depressive disorders alike?
A. There are various forms or types of depression. Some people experience only one episode of depression in their lifetime, while others may have several recurrences. Some depressive episodes occur suddenly and the cause may be unknown. Other times, an episode may be triggered by a life situation or stress. Some people suffer from bipolar depression in which their moods cycle between a manic state and a depressive state. Finally, the severity of the symptoms can vary depending on the person.

Q. How is depression treated?
A. Depression is treatable. Between 80-90 percent of people with depression, even the most serious forms, can be helped. Symptoms can be relieved quickly with psychological therapy, medication, or a combination of both. The most important step toward treating depression, and sometimes the most difficult, is asking for help.

Q. Why do people not get the help they need?
A. Often people do not know they are depressed, so they do not ask for, or get, the right help. Teenagers and adults share a problem — they often fail to recognize the symptoms of depression in themselves or in people they care about.

Q. What is depression?
A. Depression is more than the blues; it is more than the normal, everyday ups and downs. When symptoms last for more than a couple of weeks, the condition may be clinical depression. Clinical depression is a serious health problem that affects the total person. In addition to feelings, it can change behavior, physical health and appearance, academic performance, and the ability to handle everyday decisions and pressures.

Q. What causes clinical depression?
A. We do not yet know all the causes of depression, but there seems to be biological and emotional factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will develop a depressive disorder. Research over the past decade also suggests a genetic link to depressive disorders. Certain personality patterns such as difficulty handling stress, low self-esteem, or extreme pessimism about the future can increase the chance of becoming depressed.

Q. How common is depression?
A. Clinical depression affects 10 million Americans every year. One-fourth of women and one-eighth of men suffer from at least one episode of depression during their lifetimes. Approximately 3-5 percent of teenagers experience clinical depression each year. That means, among 100 friends, 4 could be clinically depressed.

Q. How serious is depression?
A. Depression can be very serious. It has been linked to poor school performance, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse and attempted suicide. In the last 25 years, the rate of suicide among teenagers and young adults has increased dramatically.

Myths about depression often separate people from the effective treatments available. Friends need to know the facts!

MYTH: Teenagers cannot suffer from “real” depression.

FACT: Depression can affect people at any age, of any race, ethnicity, and economic group.

FACTS vs. MYTHS

MYTH: People who claim to be depressed are weak and just need to pull themselves together.

FACT: Depression is not a weakness, but a serious health disorder. People who are depressed may need professional treatment. For many people, a combination of psychological therapy and medication is beneficial.

MYTH: Talking about depression makes it worse.

FACT: Talking through feelings may help a friend recognize the need for professional help. Showing concern and support may also help encourage your friend to talk to a trusted adult about their feelings. If your friend is reluctant to ask for help, you can talk to an adult for them—that’s what friends are for!

MYTH: People who talk about suicide do not commit suicide.

FACT: Many people who commit suicide do give warning to friends and family. When someone talks about committing suicide, always take them seriously. Immediately make a responsible adult aware of what your friend has said.

MYTH: Telling an adult that a friend is depressed is betraying a trust. If someone wants help, they will get it themselves.

FACT: Depression, which saps energy and self-esteem, interferes with a person’s ability to get help. It is an act of true friendship to share your concerns with a trusted adult!

For more information on depression, check out our web site virtual pamphlet collection at:

www.uwec.edu/counsel/

UWEC Counseling Services
2122 Old Library
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