

Help, Hope, and Healing

ReDiscover



When Somebody You Love Has Depression

It's normal for a friend or family member to feel sad, discouraged or 'down' from time to time. 'Blah' days or 'the blues' can happen to anyone. But what should you do when you notice that someone you care about is depressed...that days of feeling 'down' are turning into weeks or even months?

Family and friends can help. The more you know about depression and its causes, symptoms and treatment options, the more you can help yourself or someone you care about if depression strikes.

What is Depression?

Depression is a serious health problem that affects feelings and can change a person's behavior, physical health and appearance, academic performance, social activity and the ability to handle everyday decisions and pressures.

ReDiscover CEO and President Alan Flory explains, "Depression is characterized not only by negative thoughts, moods, and behaviors, but also by physical symptoms that last more than two weeks. It's important to realize that depression is not just a state of mind. Depression is related to physical changes in the brain."

What causes Depression?

A combination of genetic, psychological, and environmental factors is typically involved in the onset of a depressive disorder.

Alan Flory says, "You may have no idea why depression has struck you or someone you care about. People often look for a specific event or reason why depression began, but depression rarely has one single cause. Often, depression results from a combination of things. Some of the more common factors involved in depression can include family history, exposure to trauma and stress, pessimistic personality, ailing physical conditions, or even other psychological disorders. It's true that an external event may trigger a depressive episode. Some common triggers can be a serious loss, chronic illness, a difficult relationship, or stressful financial problems."

How can you recognize signs of depression in someone you care about?

According to Dr. Nancy Osborn, a ReDiscover psychologist who specializes in working with youth and families in ReDiscover's Adult and Family Services program, "Listen carefully to what your friend or family member talks about. Does the individual talk about feelings of sadness or emptiness? You may notice that the theme of normal conversations turn often toward feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt or despair. You may hear concerns expressed over helplessness or worthlessness. Sometimes you'll hear complaints over physical changes. Are complaints focused on having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or getting up? Does your friend or loved one complain about loss of energy, lack of drive, or feeling 'slowed down'? It's important to note that children/adolescents may express more anger or irritability and rather than seeming 'slowed down', they may appear more agitated. There also may be uncharacteristic episodes of acting out. They may actually push people away from them due to their irritability and anger, but they still feel isolated, hopeless, and helpless."

Sometimes people withdraw from talking and the signs of depression are more evident in changed behavior that you may observe. Dr. Osborn adds, "People with depression can be more irritable than normal. They may want to be left alone most of the time or they may begin missing work or school or stop participating in hobbies or other activities they have always enjoyed. Does your friend seem unable to make decisions or unable to concentrate and remember details? Does the person seem bothered by frequent headaches, stomach aches, or backaches? Does conversation include talk of death or thoughts of suicide? Symptoms of depression last more than two weeks and the person experiencing the symptoms may need support from family and friends to recognize what is wrong."

What treatment is available?

ReDiscover, and other community mental health agencies, provide services to help people with depression. There are a variety of antidepressant medications that can be used to treat depressive disorders, but care can typically include combined treatment of medication and psychotherapy.

Michael Grimes, M.A. is a licensed Psychologist for ReDiscover's Adult and Family Services program. "Psychotherapy is used to treat depression in several ways. Therapy can address painful feelings of hopelessness, change pessimistic ideas and unrealistic expectations, and even help a person with depression develop better coping skills, resolve relationship conflicts, and reduce stress."

Depression is treatable. People with depression — even the most serious forms — can be helped. The most important step toward overcoming depression is asking for help. Help is available.