

SAVE'S SUGGESTED RESOURCES

HOTLINES

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE — 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

CRISIS TEXT LINE — Text "Hello" to 741741

INFORMATION ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

SAVE — SUICIDE AWARENESS VOICES OF EDUCATION —
1-952-946-7998 | 1-888-511-7283 | www.SAVE.org

GENERAL INFORMATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR SUPPORT ALLIANCE — 1-800-826-3632
www.dbsalliance.org

NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR RESEARCH ON SCHIZOPHRENIA &
DEPRESSION (NARSAD) — 1-800-829-8289 | www.narsad.org

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (NIMH) — 1-866-615-6464
www.nimh.nih.gov

YOUTH SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS — www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org



8120 PENN AVENUE SOUTH, SUITE 470, BLOOMINGTON, MN 55431

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SAVE.ORG

PARENTS AS PARTNERS



A SUICIDE PREVENTION
GUIDE FOR PARENTS
OF TEENS



DEAR PARENTS AND OTHER CARING ADULTS

This booklet is brought to you with the understanding of the critical importance of parent involvement in all ages of children, teenagers or young adults specifically.

The purpose of this booklet is to inform parents about the symptoms of depression and warning signs of suicide in young people and how to find help addressing these issues for their family. Additional resources are listed in the back of this booklet as well.

The goals of this booklet are to educate and raise awareness of:

- Depression and its link to suicide
- Symptoms of mental illness
- Warning signs of suicide
- The resources available for referrals and more information

SAVE's mission is to prevent suicide through public awareness and education, eliminate stigma, and serve as a resource for those touched by suicide.

This booklet is just one resource to guide parents and other caring adults to better understand the link between untreated brain illnesses and suicide. SAVE also offers trained speakers and materials for purchase for schools, companies and organizations to educate more about this critical issue and has made it a priority to provide this educational tool for parents.

For more information and additional resources, please see our website at www.SAVE.org or call us at 952-946-7998.

Sincerely,

SAVE - Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

Throughout this booklet, reference to gender is alternated to simplify sentences. Please remember that depression occurs in both males and females.

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ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CHILD OR TEEN?

Most children and young people enjoy good health. However, mental health problems are not uncommon in children and adolescents.

Many children go through rough times as they mature. They may have problems at school, with friends or at home. Most often, challenging behavior improves as the child or adolescent grows and matures.

WHEN DOES MY SON OR DAUGHTER NEED HELP?

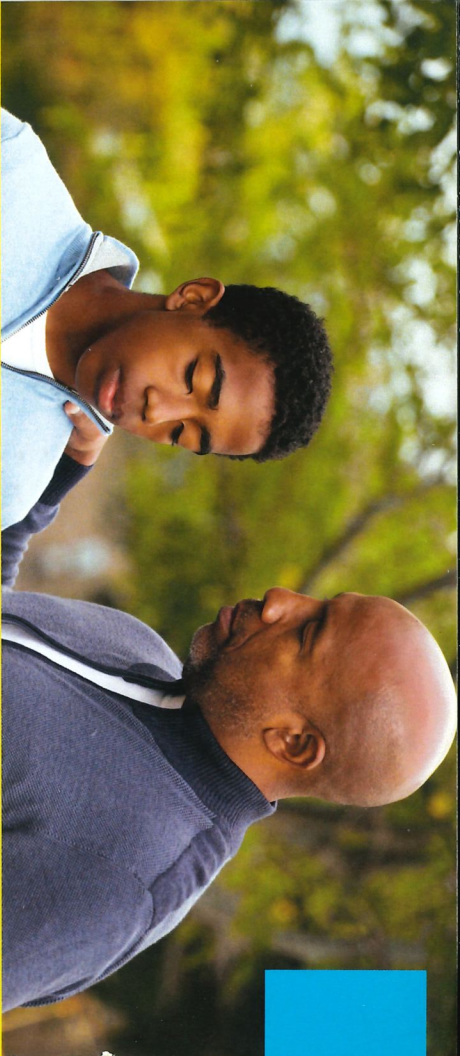
There is no single cause of mental health problems, but some contributing factors include loss, grief, discrimination, bullying or alienation at school, violence, abuse, or family difficulties like divorce or separation.

The information in this booklet will help you determine when to seek help and resources are listed in the back to assist you. However, the best time to get help is early on. The sooner you recognize a problem the better to seek professional help.



WHY SHOULD ALL PARENTS BE AWARE?

As a parent, it is difficult to even consider that your child might be thinking of ending his or her life. Yet, parents need to know that suicide is one of the leading causes of death for youth between the ages of 15 – 24. Data from the CDC also show suicide among 10 – 14 year olds is increasing. Nationally, an average of 5,000 youth die by suicide each year. Further, it is estimated that for every suicide completed in this age range, another 100 - 200 young people attempt suicide.



WHAT CAN PARENTS AND FAMILIES DO?

Parenting and being part of a family are very important to the mental health and well-being of children and young people.

You may not realize it, but you are already supporting your adolescent's mental health and well-being just by:

- Showing your affection, interest and care for them.
- Encouraging them to talk about their feelings and to work out problems even when it is difficult.
- Comforting them when they are distressed or anxious.
- Spending time with them, working on projects and taking part in activities together.
- Being aware of their needs and differences at different stages of development.
- Providing consistent care and avoiding erratic or harsh discipline.
- Spending time individually with each child if you have more than one.
- Trying not to involve young people in arguments that have nothing to do with them.
- Seeking help early if your teen is experiencing difficulties.
- Help them see their purpose and value.

READ ON...

This booklet will help you as a parent, or concerned adult, learn about depression as a mental health problem in adolescents. By learning more, you'll know what to look for in your child or teenager.

DEPRESSION: EDUCATE YOURSELF

WHAT IS CLINICAL DEPRESSION?

Depression is a medical illness. It is not the “blues.” The blues are normal feelings that eventually pass. The feelings associated with depression last longer than a couple of weeks. If your child has depression, he can't talk himself out of it. Your child isn't weak and doesn't have a character flaw. Having depression isn't his fault. Depression affects the whole body—thoughts, feelings, behavior, physical health, appearance, and all areas of a person's life—home, school and social life. The good news is that depression can be treated successfully just like other illnesses.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

Depression is triggered by a complex combination of genetic, psychological and environmental factors. Genetic factors mean that in some families, depression is inherited or passed down through genes. Psychological makeup has to do with personality traits, and environmental factors are life circumstances.

The brain is an organ of the body just like the heart, liver and kidneys. If the neurotransmitters (chemicals in the brain) that regulate how a person thinks, feels and acts, get out of balance, the brain can get “sick.” The result can be clinical depression. An unfortunate or stressful life event can trigger depression. It can also appear out of nowhere, when everything is going fine, at a time when there is no reason to get depression. Depression is nothing to be ashamed of!

Though depression is still somewhat stigmatized by society, seeking treatment for depression is just like getting a broken leg set in a cast.

WHO CAN GET DEPRESSION?

Anyone. People of all ages can get depression – even children. Boys, girls, men and women can get depression. It doesn't matter what race, ethnicity or economic group a person comes from. Depression affects more than 20 million people living in the United States each year.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE DEPRESSION?

Your child may not know she has a treatable illness. Depression affects thinking – she may not be able to think clearly or rationally, or may believe that she can't be helped. When depression is severe, it can cause thoughts of hopelessness and helplessness. Early recognition and treatment of depression can save lives.

As we've mentioned, depression is one of the most common mental health illnesses, but there are other “brain illnesses” too. These include bipolar disorder or manic depression, dysthymia (a chronic, mild to moderate depression) or various anxiety disorders including phobias, obsessive compulsive disorders and others. All of these need the attention of a mental health professional for correct diagnosis and treatment.

DEPRESSION: KNOW THE SYMPTOMS, SEE A DOCTOR.

Depression is one of the most misdiagnosed and misunderstood illnesses today because other conditions can mimic its symptoms. Some drugs used to treat other illnesses can trigger depression, so can a long term or sudden illness. These are many of the reasons why a medical examination is necessary. You cannot treat depression on your own. The first step? Visit a doctor.

Your son or daughter might have only a few of the symptoms of depression listed below or might have many. Everyone is different. There is no set number of symptoms that signal depression for certain. If any of the following are bothersome or interfere with life, a person should get help. Can you “hear” your son or daughter saying these things? What boxes do you think your child would check?

Depression has recognizable symptoms, but different people might use different words to describe them.

DEPRESSION AFFECTS MOODS AND FEELINGS.

Feeling sad, empty or numb.

- I feel so alone.
- I don't seem to feel anything.
- Everything is just “blah.”

Feeling hopeless, helpless and/or worthless.

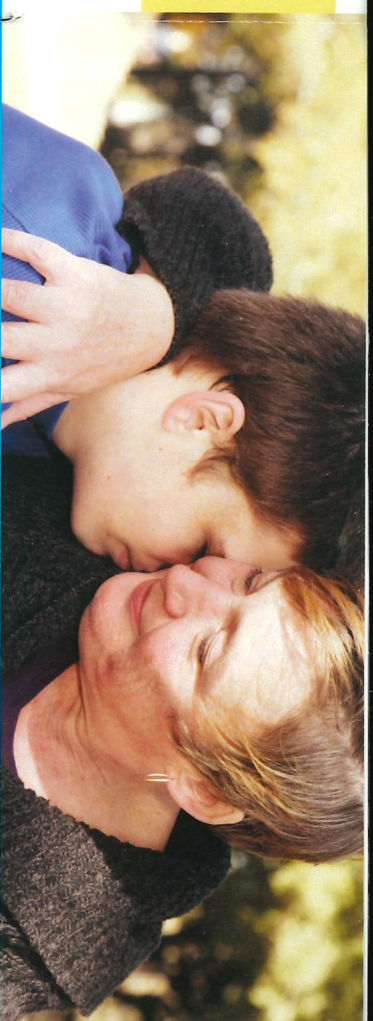
- I can't seem to do anything right.
- I feel like my life has no direction.
- Nothing I do makes me feel better.

Loss of interest, motivation or pleasure.

- I don't have fun anymore.
- I don't feel like talking — I don't have anything to say.
- I don't want to go out with friends anymore.
- Sometimes I don't feel like taking a shower, washing my hair or brushing my teeth for days.
- I don't care if I look like a slob.

Irritability or crankiness; constantly critical or complaining.

- I feel like crying a lot/all the time.
- I feel scared all the time, but I don't know why.
- I feel mad all the time like I could explode.
- I'm frustrated with everything and everybody.



“I thought he was a typical teen—moody, irritable and sleeping all the time. I thought his drop in grades, changing friends, quitting sports was part of a normal “adolescent phase.” When I read that suicide is caused by depression and that it is the third leading cause of death by young people, I started to worry. Taking my son to the doctor was the best thing I ever did. He fought me every step of the way, saying it was not a big deal. I just didn't give him a choice. I just kept reminding myself that I am the parent, and he is the child. I learned he was suffering from depression. He's now getting treatment—he's back to his old self, and I have peace of mind.”

DEPRESSION HAS PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS.

Change in appetite, unusual weight gain or loss.

- I don't feel like eating anymore.
- All I want to do is eat.
- Nothing tastes good.

Changes in sleep patterns.

- I have trouble falling asleep.
- I wake up a lot in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep.
- All I want to do is sleep.

Fatigue or loss of energy.

- Everything makes me tired.
- I'm so tired no matter how much sleep I get.
- I don't have the energy to do anything.

Physical slowing of speech, movement and/or thinking, or observable pacing or restlessness.

- I'm so restless and jittery; I can't sit still.
- I feel like my head is spinning like I can't stop thinking.
- Sometimes my heart will pound very hard. I can't catch my breath. I feel tingling. My vision seems strange, and I feel like I might pass out. It eventually passes, but I'm scared it will happen again. I feel dizzy a lot. (This is a panic or anxiety attack.)

OTHER SYMPTOMS.

- Physical pains such as headaches, stomachaches, backaches, aches in legs or arms that aren't caused by some other medical condition.
- Use of drugs or alcohol to mask or escape feelings.

DEPRESSION AFFECTS THOUGHTS.

Lowered self esteem and self confidence.

- I feel like such a failure.
- I feel like I can't do anything right.
- I don't like myself.
- I feel so guilty; it's always my fault.
- I'm always getting into trouble.
- I feel so self conscious like people are looking at me all the time.
- I have to be perfect.
- I feel different from everyone else.

Poor concentration or indecisiveness.

- I have a hard time remembering.
- I don't want to make decisions – it's too hard.
- I don't ever know what to do.
- I feel like I'm in a fog.
- I feel so disorganized.
- I can't think straight like my brain doesn't seem to "work."

Thoughts of death or suicide.

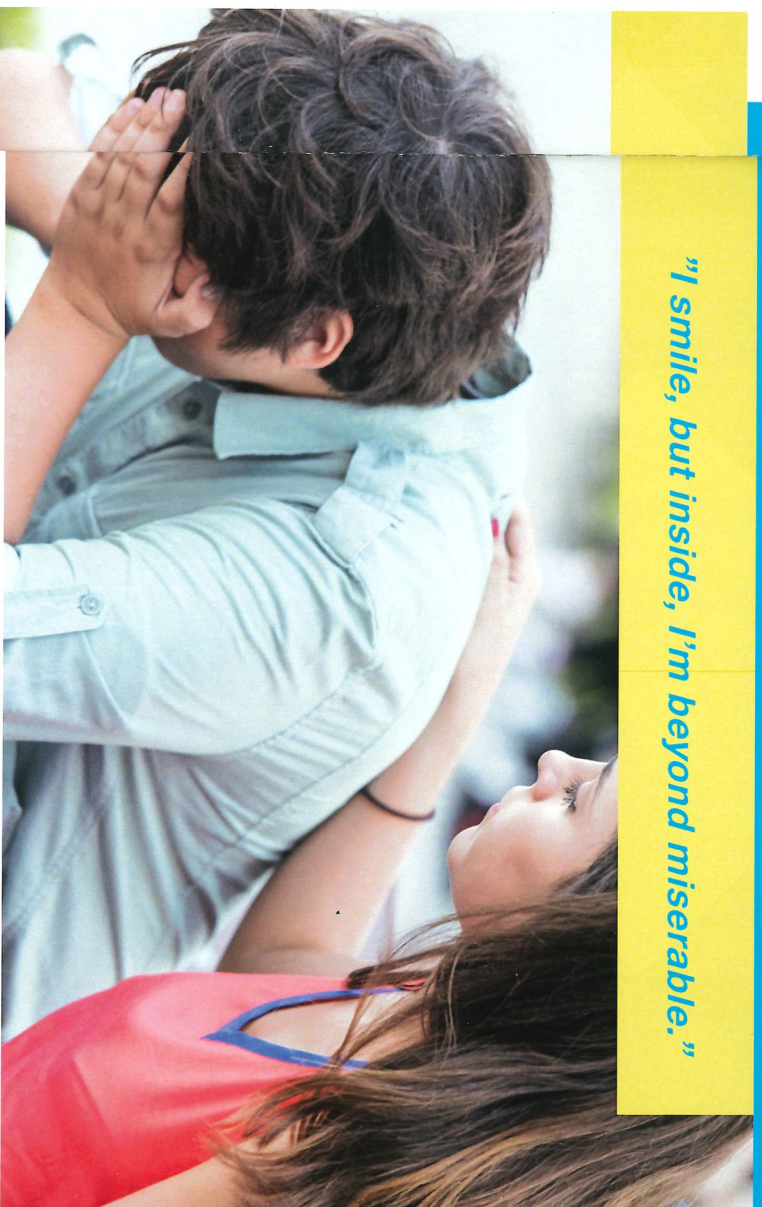
- Sometimes I feel like I can't go on living.
- Sometimes I do things that are dangerous and could hurt or kill me.
- Sometimes I cut myself.
- Sometimes I wish I were dead.
- Sometimes I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up.

In 86% of cases, a combination of antidepressant medication and therapy works to treat depression. People with depression can be helped. Your child can feel good again! A physical exam from a doctor is important to rule out any other illnesses that may have the same symptoms as depression, such as, thyroid problems or vitamin deficiency.

Your child may have the symptoms of depression, but not be suicidal. However, it is always important to watch for warning signs of suicide, just in case your son or daughter might be having suicidal thoughts.

WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE.

"I smile, but inside, I'm beyond miserable."



THESE SIGNS MAY MEAN SOMEONE IS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE. The risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss or change.

- Talking about or making plans for suicide.
- Expressing hopelessness about the future.
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress.
- Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above. Specifically, this includes significant:
 - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situations.
 - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased).
 - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context.
 - Recent increased agitation or irritability.

These warning signs were derived based on the consensus view of an expert panel that SAVE's Executive Director led from 2012-2014. To learn more go to youthsuicidewarningsigns.org to preview these up-to-date warning signs for youth suicide.

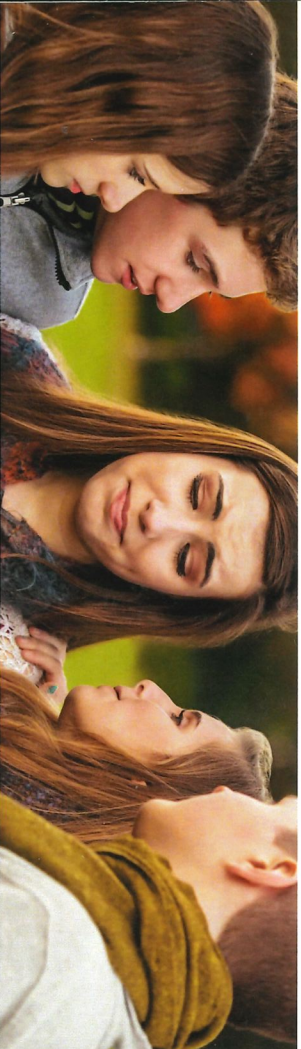
OTHER SIGNS YOU MAY SEE.

- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye.
- Giving things away or returning borrowed items.
- Organizing or cleaning bedroom or locker “for the last time.”

VERBAL CLUES.

- “I shouldn’t be here.”
- “I’m going to run away.”
- “I wish I were dead.”
- “I’m going to kill myself.”
- “I wish I could disappear forever.”
- “If a person did this... (mentions a specific act,) would he die?”
- “The voices tell me to kill myself.”
- “Maybe if I died, people would love me more.”
- “I want to see what it feels like to die.”
- “Everyone would be better off without me around.”

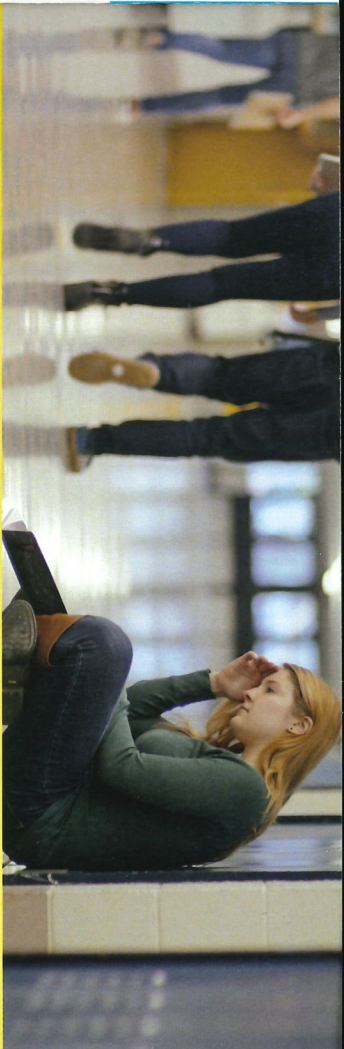
Seek help by contacting a mental health provider or calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 for a referral should you witness or hear anyone exhibiting any one or more of these behaviors.



HOW TO RESPOND

If you notice any of these warning signs in anyone, you can help!

- Ask if they are ok or if they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Express your concern about what you are observing in their behavior.
- Listen attentively and non-judgementally.
- Reflect on what they share and let them know they have been heard.
- Tell them they are not alone.
- Let them know there are treatments available that can help.
- Guide them to professional help.
- Remind them that they are important.
- Tell them you’ll help them through this.



KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFORE YOUR CHILD SHOWS SYMPTOMS OR SIGNS.

- Know the warning signs of youth depression and suicide.
- Believe that your child could be thinking about suicide.
- One in five teens considers suicide during high school.
- Be willing to talk to your child and take action.
- Find out how to get mental health care through your health care provider before your child has an emergency. If you don’t have insurance, find out about free or low cost services in your community.

IF YOUR CHILD SHOWS THE SIGNS OF THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE, REMEMBER THE ABC’S OF SUICIDE PREVENTION.

- **ASK** your child if she is feeling suicidal or thinking about ending her life. Talking to your child about suicide will not cause your child to attempt suicide, or even put the thought in her mind. Instead, it will provide your child a sense of relief.
- **BELIEVE** your child if he says he is thinking of suicide. However, even if your child denies being suicidal, your child still may be if the signs of depression and suicide are present.
- **CALL** a health care professional immediately if you believe your child is suffering from depression. If your child is suicidal, call 911 or take your child to the emergency room at your local hospital. Hospitals have trained mental health specialists to complete an assessment of risk. Do not leave your child alone, even for a minute. Your child may be in a life-threatening emergency.
- **DO NOT GIVE UP** on your child who is suicidal. Your child is ill and needs your help. He may be irritable or unpleasant – these are the effects of your child’s illness. Healthy young people are not irritable or unpleasant the majority of the time. Get your child the health care needed. They can get better and return to being the person you know and care about.