

Teens and Depression

Adolescence can be a very difficult time. Adolescents have to learn to begin asserting their independence from their parents, make independent decisions for the first time, grapple with their own emerging sexuality and gender issues. Although bad moods are expected in these years, depression is different.

Depressed adolescents may sulk, get into trouble at school, become irritable and negative and often feel misunderstood. It is important to note how different the behaviour is from your usual self. It is unfortunately not unusual for depressed adolescents to also experience other conditions such as anxiety, eating disorders or substance abuse. The risk of suicide among adolescents is also high.

What is depression?

We all experience sadness from time, however if you experience 5 or more of the following for at least two consecutive weeks you may be experiencing clinical depression:

Depression symptoms

- Being extremely tearful or sad.
- Social isolation – you don't feel like seeing family and friends and withdraw from them (e.g. refusing catching ups with friends, stop calling/ texting to or being called/ texted to, stopping social media interactions, etc).
- Feeling restless.
- Loss of interest and motivation – you stop enjoying activities once enjoyable.
- Feelings of worthlessness – you feel you are not as good as your peers, wonder why anyone would want to be your friend.
- Feeling guilty – you blame yourself and see yourself as a burden to others.
- Sleep changes – you either sleep too much or very little.
- Changes in weight and appetite – you tend to over eat or very little.
- Reduced memory and ability to concentrate and focusing– have difficulties remembering things and concentrating.
- You become indecisive.
- Irritable- you become snappy, irritable and annoyed easily.
- You feel constantly exhausted regardless of getting enough sleep.
- Thoughts of death or suicide – you have thoughts of dying or feeling that life is not worth living (e.g. “it would be best if I wasn't here”, “ I wish could just go to sleep and never wake up”, you make plans to harm yourself)
- Use alcohol or drugs as a way to stop yourself from feeling.

Causes of Depression

There are various reasons why adolescents experience depression. For some depression can be triggered by stressful life events such as a relationship break up, the death of a loved one, physical illness, being bullied, not fitting in. For some there may be factors such as:

- **Family history** – having a close family member with a history of depression can be a contributing factor. It is important to know this is only a contributing factor; as such you are at a higher risk of developing depression as compared to the general population. It does not mean you will develop depression.
- **Personality traits** – adolescents who tend to excessive worry or dwell on negative events, those who are critical of themselves are more likely to develop depression.
- **Childhood experiences** – adolescents who have experience neglect or abuse as children including bullying are more likely to develop depression.
- **Brain biology and chemistry** – changes in levels of chemicals such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine play a role in developing depression.

Treatments for Depression

At Vida Psychology we ensure to use only evidence based psychological interventions. Following are some examples:

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** It is an approach that can bring long lasting relief after short term treatment. It focuses on individuals' views and interpretations of themselves and the world and how these impact on their moods and behaviour. The objective is to identify these interpretations, challenge and replace them with more helpful interpretations. One important element of CBT is to engage on behavioural tasks that challenge those interpretations. This allows individuals the opportunity to see firsthand the inaccuracy of their views. This in turn facilitates change.
- **Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT):** It focuses on identifying and addressing interpersonal relationships and the expectations of others that may contribute to the person's depression. The objective is to help people develop assertive communication, increase adaptability, increase supports and develop new ways to resolve conflict and nurture relationships.
- **Short term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP):** It focuses on increasing the person's awareness of their own thoughts, feelings and motivations. The objective is to identify barriers that may get in the way of having healthy relationships, effective communication and daily functioning.

Depression is likely to continue into adulthood if left untreated. Thus, if you believe you may be suffering from depression it is important to seek help as soon as possible.

How to get help

Telling a close friend, teacher or family member is a great start. Your Family Doctor/ General Practitioner will be able to make the right referral to see a Psychologists and or Psychiatrist.

Our Psychologists at Vida Psychology have extensive experience in helping adolescents overcome depression.

“Your Shared Care Practice: *Working together to support patients and their GPs*”

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