

## **Adolescent Depression**

Many normal adolescents take offense easily, are often moody, and frequently argue with their parents. A depressed teenager does all of these things, but more so! In some ways, the features of depression overlap with the features of normal adolescence. Because of some of the similarities between normal and depressed adolescence, depression in teenagers may go unrecognized and many of those who are unrecognized go untreated. Parents, teachers, and other adults dismiss the troubled teenager's behaviour and say, "They're just being a teenager."

### **How Common is Depression in Adolescence?**

Two to three percent of adolescence become depressed each year, Depression is slightly more common in females than in males and in adolescence whose parents have psychiatric problems. Depression is also more likely to occur if a young person has been through a very stressful event such as parental divorce or the death of a parent. In these stressful circumstances, depression is, of course, understandable; but, treatment may be necessary if the grieving lasts for more than six months. It is also important to know that there are many teenagers who are depressed and haven't experienced a serious stressful event. Their depression may have started without an identifiable trigger.

### **What are the Signs of Adolescent Depression?**

Typical moody teenagers may be sad or irritable one day and fine the next. They may be in a bad mood, but when an activity comes up they quickly return to a normal mood. This is not true for depressed adolescents who may find it very difficult to snap out of their moodiness.

A depressed teenager's moodiness will start to interfere with their life. The adolescent's unhappiness may make others feel unhappy with them. Depressed teenagers may be so irritable or bad-tempered that other people have to be careful of what they say and do as not to upset them. Because many depressed teenagers find it difficult to concentrate, they may become less involved in their school work and their grades may suffer.

During a depressive period, a teenager's bodily functions may also be affected. There may also be changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, and weight loss or gain. A change in their activity level can often be noticed. Some teenagers become listless and seem tired all day long, while others can become very edgy and agitated. Activities and hobbies that they used to enjoy now seem to be a burden or boring. They may also make excuses to avoid seeing friends that they used to like to see.

Depressed teenagers, like depressed adults, are often critical of themselves. They will say that they keep messing up and may find faults with themselves for no apparent reason. Depressed teens may also be more apt to discuss death and dying. Consequently, they may even threaten or attempt suicide.

### **What Kind of Treatments are Available?**

Several different types of psychotherapy or counseling are used in successfully treating adolescent depression. Some of the more recently introduced antidepressants also appear to be effective and seem to have fewer side effects than antidepressants that were in common use a few years ago. A psychiatrist or psychologist should be able to make the decision about the most appropriate form of treatment. Most teenagers who become depressed will improve after receiving treatment.