

Teenage Depression: Separating Myth from Reality

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Adolescence is a challenging time. Dealing with physical, emotional, and hormonal changes while trying to balance school, work, friends and family can be stressful for anyone. Now take all these daily pressures and combine them with feelings of sadness, irritability, low energy and motivation, poor concentration, sleep disturbance (too much or too little), change in appetite and even thoughts of death. These are common experiences in the daily life of a teenager with depression.

Mental illness such as depression often goes unnoticed in teens, and is sometimes dismissed as typical teenage moodiness. The truth of the matter, however, is that it is a condition that can have serious effects on the lives of those suffering from it. There are many misconceptions associated with the condition but it's important to separate the fact from the fiction. It could mean saving someone's life. Here are eight common myths about teenage depression.

Myth #1: The majority of adolescents will go through at least one significant period of depression in their lifetime.

Reality: Depression does not affect the majority of teenagers. Only about 1 in 10 people will face an episode of clinical depression during their high school years.

Myth #2: Females are two to three times more likely than males to experience depression.

Reality: This myth is true. Of teenage youth, females *are* two to three times more likely than their male peers to experience depression or have thoughts of suicide; however their male counterparts are more likely to follow through with suicide.

Myth #3: Depression is a serious debilitating health condition.

Reality: Mental illness is serious. It is overwhelming and consuming. As one of the leading causes of disability worldwide, depression can have grave consequences. In fact, 50 per cent of youth who commit suicide have depression. The truth of the matter is that these depression-related suicides *are* preventable.

Myth #4: Depression-related problems with school functioning such as poor attendance and work completion can be overcome by stricter discipline and consequences.

Reality: Depression-related problems, such as poor school functioning, **CAN NOT** be overcome by enforcing stricter discipline and consequences on the teen. In fact, stricter discipline can actually worsen the condition, slowing recovery from the depression. It is important to know the right help is readily available.

Myth #5: Depression will usually lift spontaneously in two to three months.

Reality: While depression *can* lift spontaneously, it can take up to two years for this to happen. Teens who do not receive the appropriate treatment will suffer with the illness for an extended period of time, and evidence shows roughly 60 per cent of youth with depression will experience another episode of depression either as a teen or as an adult.

Myth #6: Getting adolescents to talk about their depression will worsen their condition.

Reality: Talking with a teen about their depression should be encouraged. It has been proven to be one of the most effective treatments for the condition and in most cases, is even as effective

as medication.

Myth #7: Getting adolescents to talk about their suicidal feelings will increase their risk of suicide.

Reality: Talking with a teen about their suicidal feelings should be encouraged. It does not increase the risk of suicide and in fact, can prevent it.

Myth #8: Research show that treatments can help.

Reality: There are many resources available for youth suffering with depression. Formal treatments such as talk therapy and medication (or a combination of the two) have been found to be effective treatments.

Education and acceptance of teen depression is critical. It is serious and should be treated like any other medical condition. Teens suffering from depression need a solid support network. Parents and mentors need to know that there are many resources available: school social workers, family doctors/ paediatricians, local hospitals, children's mental health centres, and support groups.

Recognizing the signs of teenage depression is just the first step. Youths suffering from depression need support and encouragement. They need to know they aren't alone, and that help is available. If you recognize the signs of depression in someone you know, steer them to the right resources. You could change someone's life.