



STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL'S SPARK PROGRAM



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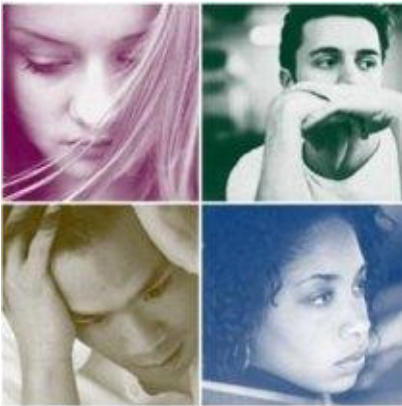
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UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

I. What Is Depression?

- **Depression:** is a mental health disorder that can affect the way you feel about yourself, the way you think about things and how you act.
- **Depression has a variety of symptoms** but the most common are a deep feeling of sadness or a marked loss of interest or pleasure in activities.
Other symptoms include:

- (1) Inexplicable cry spells/sadness
- (2) Significant weight loss or gain
- (3) Insomnia or hypersomnia
- (4) Restlessness or irritability
- (5) Feeling hopeless, worthlessness
- (6) Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- (7) Substance use/abuse
- (8) Self-harm i.e. self-cutting
- (9) Thoughts of suicide, suicide plans or attempts at suicide.



- **Depression is common.** It affects nearly one in 10 adults each year – nearly twice as many women as men. It's also important to note that depression can strike at any time but on average, first appears during the late teens to mid-20's.
Depression is also common in older adults.

II. Sadness & Depression: What's The Difference?

- **Most people have felt sad or depressed at times.** Feeling depressed can be a normal reaction to a loss, life's struggles or an injured self-esteem.
- But when feelings of intense sadness last for days to weeks and keep you from functioning normally, **your depression may be something more than sadness.**

III. Causes Of Depression

- **Depression can affect anyone** – even a person who appears to live in relatively ideal circumstances.
But several factors can play a role in the onset of depression:
- (1) **Biochemistry:** The abnormalities in two chemicals in the brain, **serotonin and norepinephrine**, might contribute to symptoms of depression including anxiety, irritability and fatigue. Other brain networks undoubtedly are involved as well.



- (2) **Genetics:** Depression can run in families. **For example**, if one identical twin has depression, the other has a 70% chance of having the illness sometime in life.
- (3) **Personality:** People with low self-esteem who are easily overwhelmed by stress or who are generally pessimistic appear to be vulnerable to depression.



- (4) **Environmental:** Continuous exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty may make people who are already susceptible to depression all the more vulnerable to the illness.
- (5) **Also a medical condition** (i.e. vitamin deficiency) can cause depression, **so it is important to be evaluated by a psychiatrist or other physician** to rule out general medical cause.

IV. Coping Mechanisms

- **Helping Yourself:**
The first step toward helping yourself is to identify the emotional, psychological and behavioral difficulties you have been experiencing which may be related to depression.
- **You should also assess** how depression may have impacted other areas of your life including relationships with family, friends, significant others, school etc.

Things To Do/Avoid

- Focus on (+) aspects of your life
- Engage in (+) physical activities
- Be open to (+) emotional support
- Get adequate amount of sleep
- Eat a proper, well-balanced meal
- Pace yourself/modify your schedule
- Eliminate unnecessary stressors
- Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs or negative peer influences/pressure
- Consult with a trusted adult
- Consult with your physician

Professional Help

- **The majority of depressive conditions can be treated** with either psychotherapy (talk therapy) or medication **i.e.** antidepressants.



- **Psychotherapy** will involve the individual but it can include other forms of therapy **i.e.** family, couple or groups with similar illnesses etc.
- **Medication i.e. antidepressants** may be prescribed to correct imbalances in the levels of chemicals in the brain.

V. Some Useful Resources

- **National Institute of Mental Health**
www.nimh.nih.gov
- **New York Presbyterian Psychiatry**
www.nyppsy psychiatry.com