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.

II. 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.

III. 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.

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

V. Some Useful Resources
- 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.

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

Stuyvesant High School’s School Counseling Department

Health & Wellness Campaign: on Mental Health Education