

synapse — The space between neurons in which neurotransmitters are released.

Discussion Topics

- In peer discussion groups, have students share strategies for relieving stress in healthy ways. Discuss the places where a person can find support if he or she is experiencing problems.
- Discuss the steps students should take if they suspect they are suffering from depression. What steps should they take if they think a friend is suffering from depression?
- Being a teenager is probably the hardest period of time in most of our lives. It's a time of significant change. We're going through both hormonal and attitudinal changes. It's a time of breaking away from family. It's a time of trying to assert ourselves as individuals. It's a time of trying to be adults when we're still in many ways kids. Discuss why these factors may contribute to depression.

Follow-up Activities

- Invite a psychiatrist to speak to the class about his or her profession and explain the many mental health resources available to teens suffering from depression.
- Discuss the fact that teenagers who are depressed are at risk for substance abuse. Create posters illustrating the cycle of addiction that can occur if teens turn to alcohol or other drugs to attempt to 'self-medicate.'

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.columbia.edu/cu/healthwise
"Go Ask Alice!" is a web site about teen issues that provides factual, authoritative information using a harm reduction perspective.
- www.nmha.org
The National Mental Health Association web site contains downloadable publications about types and causes of depression and where to get help.
- www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/childmenu.cfm
This site contains resources on depression from the National Institute of Mental Health.
- www.depression.org
This site, developed by the National Foundation for Depressive Illness, lists the symptoms of clinical depression and ways to treat the illness.

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• www.afsp.org

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention hosts this suicide prevention web site.

Suggested Print Resources

- Blauner, Susan Rose. *How I Stayed Alive When My Brain Was Trying to Kill Me: One Person's Guide to Suicide Prevention*. William Morrow Publishers, New York, NY; 2002.
- Cobain, Beverly. *When Nothing Matters Anymore: A Survival Guide for Depressed Teens*. Free Spirit Publishing; 1999.
- Garland, E.J. *Depression Is the Pits, but I'm Getting Better: A Guide for Adolescents*. Magination Press. Washington, DC; 1998.
- Klebanoff, Susan, et al. *Ups & Downs: How to Beat the Blues and Teen Depression*. Price Stern Sloan Publishing; 1999.
- Koplewicz, Harold. *More Than Moody: Recognizing and Treating Adolescent Depression*. Perigee, New York, NY; 2003.

For help with a drug problem, call 1-800-662-HELP or go to:
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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Executive Producer: Andrew Schlessinger
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TEENAGE DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

Grades 7 & up

Successful prevention education must empower teens to develop their own decision-making skills and assume responsibility for making choices that keep them healthy and safe. It is important to convey that most youths do not use drugs. In fact, smoking, drinking and other drug use has fallen among teens in recent years.

Nonetheless, drug related problems continue to devastate families and communities. Prepared with credible information, students develop an understanding of the risks involved in the use of any drug and learn that you don't have to be an addict for drugs to change your life.



Before Viewing the Program

Engage the group with the following discussion points before viewing the program. Brainstorm a list of responses and record them on the chalkboard or flipchart. After viewing the video, refer to the list and add or revise if necessary.

- Why do people use drugs?
- What is addiction?
- Do you know of someone who is addicted to drugs? What is his or her life like?
- Is there a type of person more likely to become addicted to drugs?
- What is your image of a drug addict?
- Where can a person find support if he or she is experiencing problems?

Background

Being a teenager is a huge challenge! It is normal for teenagers to feel sad or stressed. Breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, a bad grade, poor performance...there are many times in a teen's life when sadness engulfs them. Turning to someone — a friend or family member — and sharing your feelings is a great way to overcome your disappointments and start feeling better. Teens are physically, emotionally and mentally developing at a very rapid rate and are faced with many pressures — pressure to do well academically and athletically, as well as other family and social pressures. Again, talking to friends, family or someone else in the community helps teens to cope with such pressures. While depression is a normal human emotion, when feelings of depression persist for a lengthy period and interfere with a teenager's ability to function, it becomes a mental health issue.

Depression is a disorder that impacts thoughts, moods, feelings, behavior and physical health, which affects up to 10% of the population (more than 18 million Americans of all ages and races).

One of the challenges of depression is simply recognizing it. As many as two thirds of the people suffering from depression do not realize that they have a treatable illness and do not seek treatment. Teens suffering from depression can be labeled as “shy,” “lazy,” or “disobedient.” Depressed kids can get into trouble with authority figures because the illness takes away a person's hope for the future. People used to think it was “all in your head” and that if you really tried, you could “pull yourself out of it.” Doctors now know that teens suffering from depression aren't just lazy or angry. It's not a weakness — it's a medical disorder.

Symptoms of Clinical Depression

- Loss of interest in normal daily activities.
- Feelings of sadness, helplessness and hopelessness; possibly crying spells.
- Use of drugs/alcohol (substance abuse is often an attempt at self-treatment for the symptoms of depression).

In addition, for a doctor or other health professional to diagnose depression, some of the following signs and symptoms must also be present for at least two weeks:

- Sleep disturbances. Sleeping too much or having problems sleeping.
- Impaired thinking; preoccupation; inability to concentrate.
- Significant weight loss or gain of more than 5 percent of your normal weight.
- Agitation. Restlessness, irritability; becomes easily annoyed.
- Fatigue. Weariness; lack of energy. You may feel as tired in the morning as you did when you went to bed, or you may seem to do everything in slow motion and answer questions slowly in a monotone voice.
- Low self-esteem. You feel worthless and have excessive guilt. You have a persistent negative view of yourself, your situation and the future. You are oversensitive, and feel people are criticizing you.
- Thoughts of death and dying.

Some teens with depression often have other problems that can intensify their feelings of worthlessness or inner pain. Teens who cut themselves and teens who have eating disorders may have depression that needs attention.

Bipolar disorder is another kind of depression that is also sometimes referred to as manic depression. There are clear cut warning signs of the manic phase of bipolar disorder. These include feeling elated for days or weeks at a time, feeling overly irritable, and easily getting off the point in a conversation. In a manic phase, people have a great deal of energy and can go without sleep for days. Mania affects judgment, causing people to take risks and make unwise decisions.

Suicide

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged 15-24 years, and the second leading cause of death in college students. The number one cause of teen suicide is untreated depression. Almost all people who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental disorder with or without substance abuse, which is often a result of attempted self-treatment for the symptoms of depression.

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The vast majority of people who have suicidal thoughts don't want to die — they just want the pain to stop. The good news is that therapy and medication help! Here's more good news: Suicide in teens is really rare, and the suicide rate has been falling, in large part because kids have been getting more help than in the past. Nearly 90 percent of depressed people benefit from medication and psychotherapy. Those contemplating suicide can be talked out of it. Most suicidal people do not want death; they want the pain to stop.

Learn how to help yourself or someone else who is feeling suicidal! No talk of suicide should be taken lightly. It indicates the need for professional help. Any suicidal gesture, no matter how harmless it seems, demands immediate professional attention. Do not ignore suicide threats.

Focus Questions

1. Why do people become depressed?
2. If you are sad, does that mean you suffer from depression? Explain.
3. What are some of the causes of clinical depression?
4. Why does depression often go undiagnosed?
5. What is bipolar disorder?
6. What are some different forms of treatment for depression?
7. How can your diet affect your mood?
8. What should you do if you or someone you know is feeling suicidal?

Vocabulary

antidepressants — Drugs prescribed by a physician designed to control moods and take away extreme emotional lows and mood swings.

bipolar disorder (manic depression) — A type of depression that has either subtle or extreme “high” periods alternating with “low” periods of depression.

clinical depression — A medical condition that leads to intense feelings of sadness or despair which don't go away on their own, and are not necessarily related to a particular life event.

neurotransmitter — A chemical released by a neuron at a synapse to relay information to an adjacent nerve cell.

psychotherapy — A treatment that tries to eliminate or control mental illness symptoms through talking; the relationship between a therapist and a client is crucial.

‘self-medication’ — A term used to describe the use of alcohol and other drugs as a way to cope with pressures and to mask the symptoms of depression.

serotonin — A neurotransmitter found in the brain that is responsible for regulating mood, sleeping and eating habits.

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