

## Teen Depression

**Nothing seems to be going right in my life, and I honestly feel like just giving up most of the time and crawling in a hole. I feel like a failure most of the time and I'm tired of feeling so down. I don't want to burden anyone with my problems, but I don't understand why I can't just be happy. What should I do?**

Thanks for reaching out. That is the first step in overcoming the feelings you're having. Without knowing you or your situation, my first impression is that you may be suffering from depression. The teen years bring a lot of circumstances that can bring on a lot of stress, but in addition to the outside factors that may be affecting your mood, there are physical things going on in your body that may be contributing to your feelings.

While reaching out is the first step, there really is no sure-fire method or technique that can be applied to everyone's situation. Depression is a complicated and rarely understood problem. It's good to learn more about it and to understand the different forms of depression. Most importantly, know that you are not alone! Depression is a serious physical, emotional and spiritual problem that affects more than 32 million people in their lifetime.

It's good to understand the difference between depression and the feelings we experience with the normal ups and downs of life. Our mood naturally varies from day to day and everyone gets down at times. Some people experience periods of depression that are linked to life situations, like a sudden loss or traumatic experience. Grieving is a natural healing process that needs to take place following such an event. Even though it sounds like a cliché, please know that healing takes time. However, if you continue to mourn and feel down for long periods of time, even when others around you have seemed to be able to move on, you may want to seek help.

How do you know if your feelings are really depression? If you are losing control of your life situation, if you cannot control your emotions, if you think that your situation is hopeless and will never improve, if you have suicidal thoughts, if nothing seems to give you joy anymore and you are constantly sad, if you feel as though God has forsaken you and is punishing you, if you think that all your problems are caused by other people or events you cannot control and that your situation can only improve if they change, and if you constantly feel drained of energy and are unmotivated to do things that you once enjoyed, then there is a good chance that you are depressed and should seek help.

In addition to seeking help from a pastor, counselor, or youth leader, you can keep these things in mind when beginning your journey of healing from depression:

- #1** *Let others help you!* Our natural tendency is to want to fix things on our own, but with depression, isolation and secrecy is the enemy. Your feelings of failure will only intensify if you try to battle depression alone.
- #2** Participate in activities that may make you feel better.
- #3** Mild exercise, going to a movie, a ballgame, or participating in church, social, or other activities may help.
- #4** Postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted. Before deciding to make a significant transition — start a new love relationship, quit school, change jobs, get married, etc. Discuss it with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation. Oh, and be open to their input!
- #5** While feelings can be overwhelming, they are also often untrustworthy for someone who is depressed. Remember, feelings do NOT determine truth. If you are feeling worthless, hopeless or like a failure, try to take a step back and gain a new perspective and talk with someone who can be more objective. There is always hope.

When we're depressed, we often make poor choices in an effort to end the pain. It is not uncommon for those who are depressed to turn to alcohol, drugs, self-harm, food, promiscuity or other destructive choices. Sadly, these things only add to the pain, accentuate the feelings of failure and deepen the despair. If you are turning to any of these for solace, please seek help immediately. Likewise, if you feel out of control, despondent, have thoughts of suicide or find yourself isolating and unable to do normal activities, please get help.

There is some debate about medical treatment for depression and the use of drugs, but we believe that there are cases where medication is needed to help conquer depression, but it should be used in combination with counseling to address the underlying emotional and spiritual issues. There's no reason to feel guilty for seeking help; it is not an admittance of failure, it is an act of courage.

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.

