

stress. Sometimes people who are depressed cannot perform even the simplest daily activities – like getting out of bed or getting dressed; others go through the motions, but it is clear they are not acting or thinking as usual. Some people suffer from bipolar disorder in which their moods cycle between two extremes – from the depths of desperation to frenzied talking or activity or grandiose ideas about their own competence.

### Can it be treated?

*Yes, depression is treatable.* Between 80 and 90 percent of people with depression – even the most serious forms – can be helped.

There are a variety of antidepressant medications and psychotherapies that can be used to treat depressive disorders. Some people with milder forms may do well with psychotherapy alone. People with moderate to severe depression most often benefit from antidepressants. Most do best with combined treatment: medication to gain relatively quick symptom relief and psychotherapy to learn more effective ways to deal with life's problems, including depression.

The most important step toward overcoming depression – and sometimes the most difficult – is asking for help.

### Why don't people get the help they need?

*Often people don't know they are depressed, so they don't ask for or get the right help.* Teenagers and adults share a problem – they often fail to recognize the symptoms of depression in themselves or in other people.

## ...Be Able To Tell Fact From Fiction

**Myths** about depression often separate people from the effective treatments now available. Friends need to know the **facts**. Some of the most common myths are these:

*Myth:* It's normal for teenagers to be moody; Teens don't suffer from "real" depression. **Fact:** Depression can affect people at any age or of any race, ethnic, or economic group.

*Myth:* Teens who claim to be depressed are weak and just need to pull themselves together. There's nothing anyone else can do to help. **Fact:** Depression is not a weakness, but a serious health disorder. Both young people and adults who are depressed need professional treatment. A trained therapist or counselor can help them learn more positive ways to think about themselves, change behavior, cope with problems, or handle relationships. A physician can prescribe medications to help relieve the symptoms of depression. For many people a combination of psychotherapy and medication is beneficial.

*Myth:* Talking about depression only makes it worse. **Fact:** Talking through feelings may help a friend recognize the need for professional help. By showing friendship and concern and giving uncritical support, you can encourage your friend to talk to his or her parents or another trusted adult, like a teacher or coach, about getting treatment. If your friend is reluctant to ask for help,

you can talk to an adult – that's what a real friend will do.

*Myth:* Telling an adult that a friend might be depressed is betraying a trust. If someone wants help, he or she will get it.

**Fact:** Depression, which saps energy and self-esteem, interferes with a person's ability or wish to get help. And many parents may not understand the seriousness of depression or of thoughts of death or suicide. It is an act of true friendship to share your concerns with a school guidance counselor, a favorite teacher, your own parents, or another trusted adult.

## ...Know the Symptoms

The first step toward defeating depression is to define it. But people who are depressed often have a hard time thinking clearly or recognizing their own symptoms. They may need your help. Check the following boxes if you notice a friend or friends with any of these symptoms persisting longer than two weeks.

- Do they express feelings of
- Sadness or "emptiness"?
  - Hopelessness, pessimism, or guilt?
  - Helplessness or worthlessness?

- Do they seem
- Unable to make decisions?
  - Unable to concentrate and remember?
  - To have lost interest or pleasure in ordinary activities – like sports or band or talking on the phone?
  - To have more problems with school and family?