

DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

“Everybody goes through difficult times, but it is those who push through those difficult times who will eventually become successful in life. Don't give up, because this too shall pass.”

Many people experience the first symptoms of depression during their early college years. Unfortunately, many young adults having depression do not get the required help. They may not know where to go for help, or they may believe that the treatment would not help. Others even do not seek help because they think their symptoms are just part of the typical exam or grade stress, adjustment phase, or they worry about being judged if they seek mental health care.

What is Depression?

Depression is a mental illness caused due to any trauma, genetic predisposition or negative life experiences, which people find difficult to cope with. It also brings changes in brain chemistry, ultimately affecting a person's thoughts, behaviour and bodily functions. It means that sometimes behaviour problems are not just problems, they are surface signs of a deeper cause. Depression in adolescents is common: more than 1 in 5 youths experience clinical depression. You might see someone you know with one or more of the following surface signs that may indicate depression: or be really clever to have friends.

- ◊ Sadness that lasts longer than a few days or weeks
- ◊ Little or no enjoyment in life
- ◊ Tired much of the time
- ◊ Difficulty concentrating
- ◊ Feeling worthless or guilty
- ◊ Hopelessness and despair
- ◊ Conflicts with roommates, friends or peers
- ◊ Poor academic performance
- ◊ Hopelessness about future
- ◊ Feelings of helplessness
- ◊ Changes in sleep pattern and appetite
- ◊ Homesickness
- ◊ Increased use of drugs
- ◊ Irritability
- ◊ Withdrawal from family, friends and activities once enjoyed
- ◊ Suicidal thoughts/ideation

Common Concerns among Students Experiencing Depression

- ◆ **Academic problems:** Missing classes, not completing assignments, inattentiveness, and/or failing exams and courses, on repeated probations or deferment.
- ◆ **Relationship problems:** conflicts with roommates, parents, friends and feelings of social isolation.
- ◆ **Engaging in risky behaviours:** violence, recklessness, drug abuse, and suicidal thoughts/ Ideation.

How to Cope with Depression or Depressive Symptoms?

Identifying and diagnosing depression among young adults is considered as one of the difficult and challenging tasks. Because symptoms of depression among young adults are generally misunderstood as normal adjustment phase of any transition, such as university life. Following are the self-help tips to overcome depression or depressive symptoms:

- ◆ **Reach out and stay connected:** Look for support from people who make you feel safe and cared for
- ◆ **Do things that make you feel good:** Come up with a list of things that you can do for a quick mood boost
- ◆ **Get moving:** Exercise is something you can do to boost your mood
- ◆ **Challenge negative thinking:** Avoid generalising from a single negative experience, expecting it to hold true forever
- ◆ **Stay connected with your feelings:** Acknowledge and accept your feelings
- ◆ **Relaxation and breathing exercises may help:** If symptoms are still not getting better then seek professional help: getting the right medication and therapy can do a lot of good.

How Depression leads to Suicide?

Depression is a serious mental health condition that can become harmful if it is not treated. In many cases, untreated depression can lead to suicidal ideation or attempts. Depression if not treated can worsen the symptoms of feelings of hopelessness and helplessness and enhance sense of worthlessness, which may result in suicidal ideation or attempt.

What is Suicidal Ideation?

Suicidal ideation is wanting to take one's own life or thinking about suicide. There are two kinds of suicidal ideation: Passive and Active. Passive suicidal ideation occurs when a person wishes that he/she could die, but does not actually have any plans to commit suicide. Active suicidal ideation, on the other hand, is not only thinking about it but having the intent to commit suicide, including planning how to do it.

Myths about Suicide

- ◆ Talking about suicide is bad as it may give someone the idea to try it
- ◆ Someone who is suicidal is determined to die and will always remain suicidal
- ◆ Only mentally ill people are suicidal
- ◆ People who threaten suicide are just seeking attention
- ◆ Once a person has made a serious suicide attempt, that person is unlikely to make another
- ◆ If a person is seriously thinking about taking his/her own life, then there is nothing you can do
- ◆ Most suicides happen suddenly without warning

Know the Risk Factors of Suicide

People are mostly aware about the life circumstances of their friends. Following known risk factors should be taken seriously whenever observed:

- ◆ Feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, or shame
- ◆ Life Transition (Adjustment phases)
- ◆ Family stress/Dysfunction
- ◆ Mental Illness
- ◆ Previous suicide attempts
- ◆ Financial constraints
- ◆ Recent Loss (death of someone close, break-up etc)
- ◆ Poor academic performance (i.e., low GPA, or failing subjects)

Know the Warning Signs of Suicide Risk

Not everyone exhibits the same signs when they are thinking about suicide, but these warning signs need to be addressed:

- ◆ Reports feeling very depressed
- ◆ Talks about committing suicide
- ◆ Is focused on death and dying
- ◆ Writes poems, letters, drawings or stories about death and/or suicide
- ◆ Suicide notes and plans (including online postings)
- ◆ Experiences feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- ◆ Prepares for death by making out a will Says things like, "I don't deserve to be here,"
- ◆ "I wish I were dead," "I am going to kill myself," or "I want to die"
- ◆ Has experienced a recent loss (e.g., death or break-up)
- ◆ Displays impulsive or aggressive tendencies Has previously attempted suicide

What to Do

Persons who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly. However, friends, parents, faculty and hostel personal can recognise the warning signs and take immediate actions to keep the youth safe. When a student shows signs that they may be considering suicide, the following actions should be taken:

- ◆ Remain calm
- ◆ Take suicide seriously
- ◆ Ask the person directly if he or she is thinking about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking of suicide?")
- ◆ Listen and accept the other person's feelings. Try not to judge or argue
- ◆ Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever
- ◆ Remove means for self-harm
- ◆ Never dare someone to kill him or herself
- ◆ Offer to go with the person to seek help from a counsellor or other source of support
- ◆ If possible, do not leave the person alone. If you are unable to stay with the person, call on others (hostel staff, etc.) to assist

Don't

- ◆ Be judgmental
- ◆ Ignore or explain away suicidal behaviour or comments
- ◆ Ignore verbal and behavioural warning signs
- ◆ Assume that he/she will easily get over a loss
- ◆ Be misled
- ◆ Be sworn to secrecy
- ◆ Attempt to impose guilt by preaching or debating the rightness or wrongness of suicide
- ◆ Act shocked at what the person may say to you
- ◆ Assume that the person will be all right if left alone
- ◆ Leave the means of suicide available (e.g., remove the tools which can be used to harm oneself or medication)

Protective Factors That Lower Suicide Risk

Following are the protective factors that can reduce the suicide risk among students:

- ◆ Family relationships (e.g., positive support from parents)
- ◆ Friendships
- ◆ Sense of belonging (e.g., part of university community, Groups)
- ◆ Spirituality (meditation, yoga, prayer)
- ◆ Exercise and sports
- ◆ Setting and pursuing goals
- ◆ Hobbies (e.g., music, art)
- ◆ Practicing Religion (Offering Prayers etc)
- ◆ Setting sights on future personal and academic goals
- ◆ Developing a strong sense of cultural identity

Find Someone else Who Can Help

If you are in Academic setting, following resources are available:

- ◆ Counselling Centre
- ◆ Family, Friends/ Teachers
- ◆ Medical Centre
- ◆ Campus/Hostel Administration

Having difficult times and grief and brokenness, does not mean that life is over. These are just bumps in the road, obstacles to be overcome and made stepping stones into a long successful life.

FOR APPOINTMENT:

CENTRE FOR COUNSELLING & CAREER ADVISORY
BLOCK C, SADA BUILDING,
NUST H-12 CAMPUS, ISLAMABAD
☎ 051-90851579, 1571

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