

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

**PARTNERS
FOR HEALTH**
EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

Depression and suicide

Parents Tammy and Steve began noticing changes in their 15-year-old daughter, Leann. After having recently quit the school soccer team, Leann was spending much more time alone, was extremely sullen around the house, and had virtually stopped eating. Her mom observed Leann several times staying up late and crying while using her phone. When Tammy asked Leann what was wrong, Leann was dismissive, saying, "None of it matters now." Tammy and Steve had never seen Leann so depressed.

When we see dramatic negative changes in those around us, it's vital to ask questions and provide support in a timely way.

Depression can be a dangerous trap. The experience of depression can distort a person's thinking, interfering with his or her ability to solve painful life problems. When someone is severely depressed, the problems can seem permanently inescapable, and there is a real risk for self-harm. In fact, the most common reason for suicide is untreated depression. More than 90 percent of suicides are associated with a mental health disorder.

Warning signs can be missed. If you're depressed, it's possible that you may not be fully aware of your condition. Also, the people around you may not recognize your need for help. However, it's crucial to get treatment. If you suspect that a friend or loved one is severely depressed, do everything you can to get immediate help for them.

Teens are at high risk. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among U.S. teens. When a young person expresses feelings of hopelessness and makes references to self-harm or death, parents should take these statements very seriously. Contrary to myth, asking questions about issues of self-harm does not increase the likelihood of suicidal actions.

Although Leann was reluctant to talk with her parents, Tammy and Steve persisted. They learned that Leann was being cyberbullied and had been excluded from her prior group of friends on the soccer team. Tammy contacted the ParTNers EAP and talked with a licensed mental health professional about safety strategies and counseling options for Leann.

Depression affects people of all ages and all walks of life. When it's not treated, depression can lead to self-harming behaviors, including suicide.

Many external factors can lead a person to consider suicide—from bullying to relationship breakups to financial crises. However, the internal impact on a person's emotions—depression—represents the dark cloud that makes destructive decisions more likely.

So, in addition to securing the safety of someone who is suicidal, the person's depression requires immediate attention. Although some people are hesitant to seek treatment, getting care for depression is just as important as treatment for other medical conditions. Depression treatment often includes psychotherapy and antidepressant medications.

Clinical professionals at the ParTNers EAP can assist you and your household members with concerns about depression, suicide and other behavioral health problems. Your outreach to the ParTNers EAP is free and fully confidential. Simply call toll-free **1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)** at any time for prompt professional guidance.



What is depression?

Depression is a serious health condition typically caused by some combination of brain chemical imbalances, genetic factors (i.e., family history of the illness), difficult life events and co-existing medical conditions. Depression is known as a mood disorder. It can affect every aspect of your life. In addition to having an impact on your feelings, depression can change your behavior, your physical health and appearance, and your ability to handle everyday decisions and pressures. If not treated, depression can lead to serious complications that put your life at risk.



Depression is quite common, and fortunately, very treatable. Each year, approximately 19 million Americans suffer with depression, and more than 80 percent of people who get treatment show improvement.

- **Know what depression isn't.** Depression is not just feeling blue after a sad event, or angry and upset after an argument with someone. The distress involved in such situations usually lessens after a short time, and you can get back to your regular routine before long.
- **Recognize the signs.** (See sidebar.)
- **Depression is a serious medical condition.** Since changes in brain chemistry are often involved in the development of depression, it's essential to seek treatment as you would for any other medical condition such as high blood pressure, diabetes or allergies. Depression isn't a weakness or character flaw, and a person cannot just "snap out of" depression.
- **Diagnosis and treatment are essential.** When you recognize depression symptoms, it's important to quickly see your physician or a mental health professional for a confidential evaluation. (Pediatricians can play a vital role by screening adolescents for suicidal thoughts and risk factors.) Key components of treatment include correctly diagnosing the condition and starting an individualized plan of care.
- **Combination therapy is often effective.** The most common treatments for depression are 1) therapeutic counseling with a licensed mental health professional, 2) a course of antidepressant medication, or 3) a combination of both counseling and medication. This combination has proven highly effective for most people.
- **Follow through with treatment.** It's important to follow your provider's plan of care, including taking medications exactly as directed and for as long as prescribed.
- **Start with a phone call.** If you have questions about depression and want to learn more about what's involved in treatment, simply pick up the phone and contact your ParTNers EAP. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

Signs and symptoms

It's quite normal to get "the blues" from time to time. However, if your feelings of sadness are intense and continue for two weeks or more, you could be suffering from depression. Depression is a serious medical condition that can have a harmful effect on your mood and thinking. Common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or despair that won't go away
- Loss of interest in one's usual activities
- Dramatic loss of energy
- Insomnia, early awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and weight changes
- Restlessness, irritability or anger
- Poor concentration and decision making
- Unexplained body aches and pains
- Low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness
- Thoughts or talk of death or suicide.

Recognizing depression is the first step in getting the right kind of help. If you recognize the above symptoms in yourself or in a friend or loved one, call a health care provider or your program's toll-free number. Arrange for a confidential evaluation. Anyone who has thoughts about hurting him- or herself should be taken seriously and get professional help immediately.

National Depression Screening Day

Did you know that depression is the leading cause of disability in the United States that affects 9.9 million American adults each year? That's 5 percent of the adult population.

Did you know that nearly twice as many women as men are diagnosed with depression each year? Or that all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups can find themselves facing depression?

The good news is that although depression can be a devastating illness, it is highly treatable. Between 80 and 90 percent of people with depression can be effectively treated and can return to their typical daily activities with emotional stability.



This year, National Depression Screening Day is on Thursday, October 6, 2016. National Depression Screening Day is held each year during Mental Illness Awareness Week and is designed to call attention to depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. National Depression Screening Day helps educate all Americans about the symptoms of these disorders and effective treatments, offers individuals the opportunity to be screened for the disorders and connects those in need of treatment to the mental health care system.

If you or someone you know is struggling with symptoms of depression, you can complete an anonymous online screening at www.depression-screening.org_screen.cfm.

If you would like information on where to go for mental health resources in your area, please contact the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Office of Consumer Affairs and Peer Recovery Services, at (800) 560-5767 or go online to www.tn.gov/mental.

Living with bipolar depression

Bipolar disorder can involve severe mood swings—from excessively “high” and/or irritable to sad and hopeless, with periods of normal mood in between. A combination of medication, psychotherapy, and support from family and friends helps people with bipolar disorder stabilize their emotions.

If you suffer with this illness, consider these steps:

- Talk with your doctor about your treatment options and progress. Don't hesitate to ask questions or raise concerns about your treatment.
- Keep a regular routine, such as going to sleep and eating meals at the same time each day.
- Strive to get enough sleep—at least seven or eight hours per night.
- Get regular exercise, which helps improve your mood while relieving stress and depression.
- Learn to recognize and list (via a mood chart) the warning signs that typically precede your manic or depressive episodes.
- Stay on your medication. Take it exactly as directed.
- Expect your symptoms to improve gradually, not immediately.
- Avoid use of alcohol and drugs, which can have adverse interactions with medicines for bipolar disorder.
- Join a support group to learn coping skills from others who have bipolar disorder.



Warning signs of suicide

The impulsive act of suicide can be prevented if you're able to spot the warning signs and help keep the person safe. When someone is at risk for suicide, they may:

- Withdraw and become isolated from family and friends
- Give away prized possessions
- Often seem to wish for death or having not being born, or make statements such as, “There’s nothing left to live for”
- Engage in daring, risk-taking behavior
- Show stark personality changes (e.g., withdrawal, aggression, moodiness) or large emotional swings
- Be very depressed
- Have attempted suicide in the past
- Exhibit a change in appetite, weight or sleeping patterns
- Obtain items that could be used for self-harm such as a gun or medications
- Lose pleasure in regular activities, or express a lack of interest in the future
- Experience a severe loss of energy.

If you recognize a number of these symptoms, quickly contact a mental health provider, physician, or suicide/crisis hotline for advice and help.

Acting quickly can be the difference between life and death. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

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