

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at www.aldenson.com. Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

Thanks for watching and God Bless!

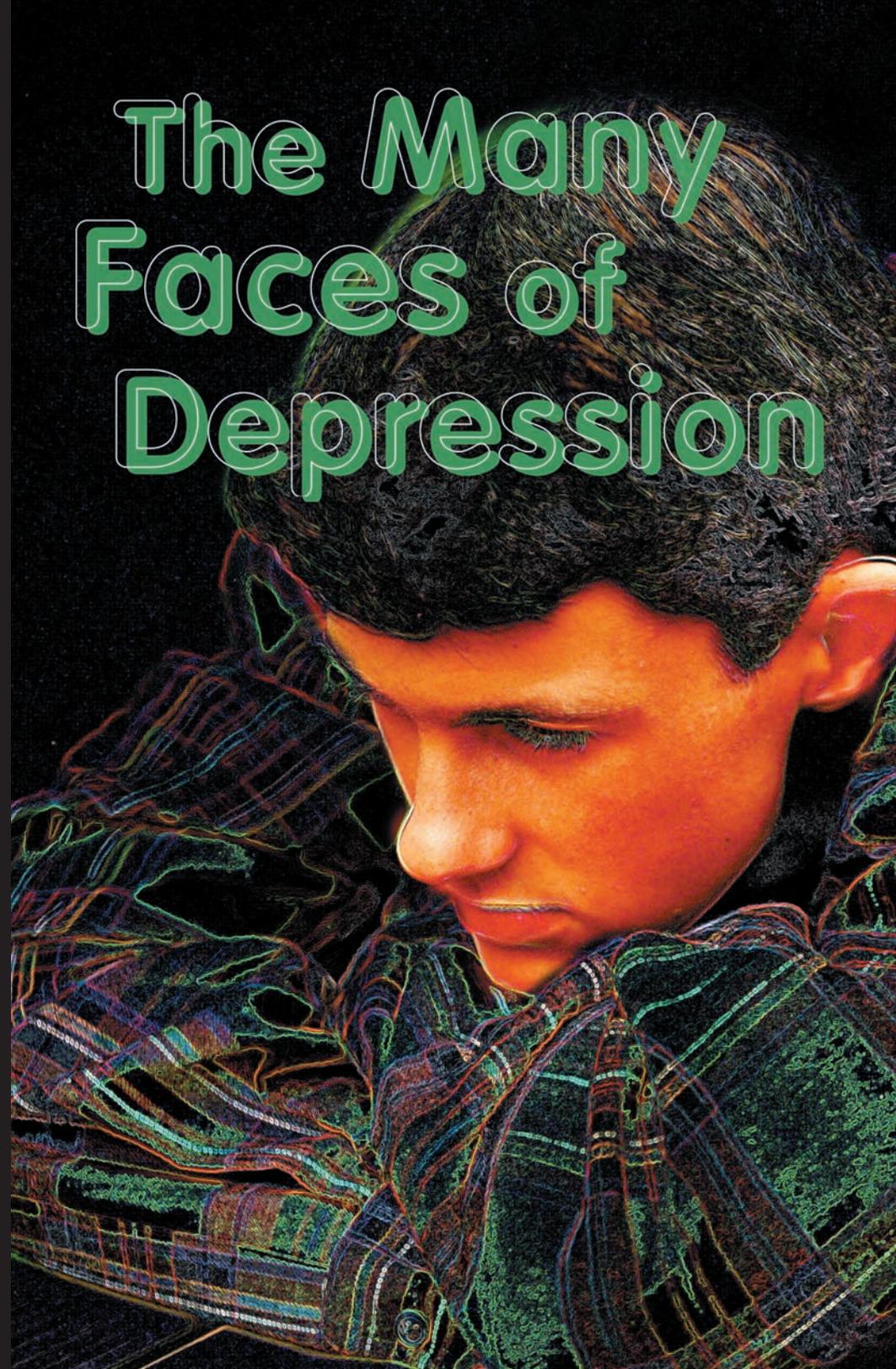
Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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The Many Faces of Depression





Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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The Many Faces of Depression

If You Are Depressed Here Are Some Things That You Need To Know...

Becoming a Christian is not a vaccination against depression. Being a Christian does not always equal happiness. It is true that Jesus gives us joy, but many times, for many reasons, that joy is mixed with pain. Peter knew this first hand when he said in I Peter 1:6, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Somewhere it seems that Christians have gotten the idea that they are always supposed to be “up” and “on top” of everything. But nowhere in the Bible is this taught. Jeremiah, the great prophet (and by the way, called the weeping prophet) of God said in Lamentations 3:20, “My soul is downcast within me.” The great King David said in Psalm 31:9, “My eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.”

Everyone gets depressed at times, but left alone, depression will cause you not to care about the things that would normally be very important to you. As a result, when you are depressed it is easy not to care about your

convictions and begin to let things slide. There are four things you need to guard against when you find yourself depressed:

1. Focusing on your feelings and not on the facts. This is called “emotional reasoning.”

“I feel like it, so it must be true.” That is a very destructive line of reasoning. Your feelings are HIGHLY unreliable. Feelings are important, but they are not to be trusted, and certainly should not be the basis for your decisions.

2. Comparing yourself to other people. This will always breed unhappiness and more depression. The

only person you can be is you. If you try to be like someone other than who you are, you will be constantly depressed. When you get depressed, you usually try to motivate yourself with criticism and condemnation, but these are no solutions for depression.

3. Blaming yourself for negative things that are not your fault. When you assume responsibility for other people’s actions and responses, you assume a responsibility that is not yours. You can influence other people, but you cannot control them. Do not allow yourself to become depressed by what you can’t control.

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

— I Peter 1:6

4. Exaggerating the negative.

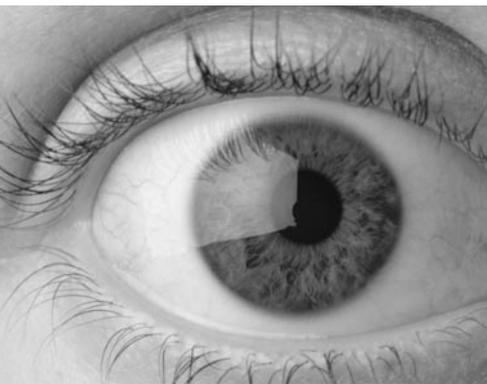
When you are depressed, you will always tend to exaggerate the negative and make things out to be worse than they really are. You will easily become overwhelmed at that point with your problems.

Sometimes it is possible to be more depressed than you realize. Here are some symptoms of depression that will help you decide if you are seriously depressed:

1. Extreme Sadness. You feel sad all of the time and can't get over it, or you feel so sad that you don't think you can stand it.

2. Sleep Disturbance. You sleep too much or not enough. You get tired doing almost anything, or you are too tired to do anything at all.

3. Pessimism about Life. This just means that you feel discouraged about the future. You may feel like you have nothing to look forward to or that things are so hopeless that there is no way they will get better.



4. Life Seems Worthless. You don't enjoy the things that used to bring you pleasure. You find that you are bored or dissatisfied with everything.

5. Helplessness. You cry all the time or you can't cry at all.

6. Physical Signs. You either eat all the time or find that you can't eat at all.

7. Desire for Death. You may think about death a lot, or have thoughts of killing yourself, even though you would never carry them out, or you may think that you would kill yourself if you had the chance.

You can have one or more of these symptoms, but still appear to most people like nothing is wrong. But if the symptoms last more than a couple of weeks and seem to be getting worse, then you need to allow someone to help you. Talking to the right person does help. Depression is painful but you don't need to suffer needlessly.

Most people believe that when depression gets severe that it causes a person to feel hopeless. It is really the opposite that is true. Hopelessness makes you depressed. Depression can be strictly physical in nature, caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that is treatable. But most times, depression occurs when you believe that you have no hope of ever feeling better or getting well; when you believe that your financial situation will never change; that your grades will never go up; that your appearance will never improve; or that your family or relationship

problems will never be resolved. You can deal with the pain if you know that it is going to be short-lived, or at least have an end. When life hurts so bad and you feel hopeless that it will never be any different, depression sets in like a fog on the ocean.

If you have allowed sin a place in your life, then it could be that your depression is a result of that compromise. We know that once a person has been saved and is "in Christ" that there is no way they can lose their salvation. That relationship is a permanent one that is not dependent on us, but is built on the completed work of Jesus on the cross. However, even though the relationship can never be lost, fellowship with our Father is damaged when we choose to sin. King David understood this all too well.

Read Psalm 51 and see how sin can make a child of God depressed.

There is good news if you find yourself depressed because you have blown it. I John 1:9 says, "If we will confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There are some important things that you must understand about this verse and the restoration process.

1. FORGIVENESS. When you got saved Jesus paid for and forgave ALL your sins; past, present and future. Forgiveness is like a box of laundry detergent that Jesus purchased for you and put your name on. It already belongs to you. Repentance and confession are like the water that "activates" that detergent and cleanses you when you need it, restoring your fellowship with God.

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you will always tend to
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2. CONFESSION. This is not just agreeing with God that you have sinned or made a mess of things. It is seeing sin in all of its awfulness. It is realizing the evil and the destructiveness of sin, and how it has broken the heart of the Father. You need to understand what sin cost God and hate it the way He hates it. Real confession makes the next step of real repentance possible.

3. REPENTANCE. Most teenagers mistakenly think that repentance is either about starting to do the things they should, or stopping what they shouldn't be doing. That makes repentance all about works. Genuine repentance doesn't focus on your performance. It focuses on your relationship with God. Repentance is laying down the control of your life that you took from God, and yielding your life back to Him again. The sum of the Christian life is that you live a totally dependent life on God. God's purpose in all of your pain and problems is that these bring you to the end of your self-sufficiency and into that dependent relationship with Him.

If you are a person who seems to be unable to live consistently for any length of time, there are some basic issues that could be causing your problem. Decide if you have a:

1. Spiritual Issue. You may be a person who has never really been saved. Perhaps you have even grown up in a Christian home and

have been in church all your life. You may know all the right answers to all the questions, but have never really had a personal experience with Christ. You have assumed that having Christian parents, or going to church, or being baptized was all you needed, and you have been trying to live the Christian life without the benefit of a power source. That is enough to make anyone depressed. You need to give your heart and life to Jesus Christ and be filled with His empowering Spirit.

2. Mental Issue. No, this doesn't mean that you are "mental." It just means that you have never become well-grounded in the fundamentals of who you are in Christ and what really happened to you when you got saved. Your belief system is faulty so you ride an emotional roller coaster all the time. You see, it is impossible to live consistently in a way that is inconsistent with what you think about yourself, and what you think about yourself as a Christian is determined by what you think God thinks about you.

You can tell what you believe not by what you say, but by how you live. When you live beneath your privilege as a Christian, it is either because you have forgotten who you really are, or because you don't know who you are in Christ and what God says about you.

If you will believe what God says: (a) that you are totally forgiven, unconditionally loved and accepted by Him; (b) that you are

NOW holy, righteous, blameless, pure, and pleasing; (c) that He isn't angry with you; (d) that you are a royal son or daughter of the King, then that is how you will live. But, if you believe that (a) your relationship with God is performance based; (b) that God is angry with or disappointed in you; or (c) that you are still a guilty, dirty sinner at heart, then that is how you will live.

3. Emotional Issue. If you live by your feelings, you won't live consistently for very long, because your feelings will lie to you. Many teens are trying to run this race called the Christian life weighed down with so much emotional baggage that they find themselves constantly fatigued, depressed and falling away. Sometimes teenagers have the mistaken idea that "good" Christians don't have problems, so

they just try to sweep the guilt, shame and fear that they still carry under the rug of their lives.

If this is what you believe, you need to understand that the way to get started on the road to healing and freedom is to be honest — honest with yourself and honest with God. Jesus said that the truth will set you free. Well, the truth can only set you free when you are willing to be truthful. You must learn to live by, and make decisions based on facts, not feelings. This is easy to do when things are going well and you are on a mountaintop. But you have to remind yourself over and over again that the same facts that are true on the mountain are true in the valley. Circumstances don't change the facts, and God certainly doesn't change.

Repentance is laying down the control of your life that you took from God, and yielding your life back to Him again.

Depression is not something to be ashamed of. It doesn't mean that you are crazy or defective.

So, what are the facts?

- A. God is perfect in His love to us.
- B. God is infinite in His wisdom toward us.
- C. God is completely sovereign (in control) over us.
- D. God is always and only good to us.
- E. Because of Jesus I am completely forgiven of all my sin.
- F. Because of Jesus I am now holy, righteous, blameless, and pure.
- G. Because of Jesus I am now unconditionally loved and accepted by God.
- H. Because of Jesus I am pleasing to God and He is not angry with me or disappointed in me.

Romans 12:2 tells you that you are not to think the way the world thinks, but you are to have your life transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you are really going to have your thinking changed so you can live a consistent, godly life, then you must rehearse the "facts" on a daily basis.

4. Forgiveness Issue. This is one of the main reasons that some Christians are unable to win over depression. When a Christian chooses not to be obedient to God and accept the grace to forgive another person, then a root of bitterness begins to grow in his life. That root produces many ugly and deadly fruits. An unforgiving, bitter spirit will

- A. keep you from being able to love and be loved unconditionally;
- B. cause you to doubt your salvation;
- C. keep you from being able to pray effectively;
- D. make it impossible for you to live consistently; and/or
- E. lead to DEPRESSION, anger, rage, violence as well as mental, emotional and physical problems.

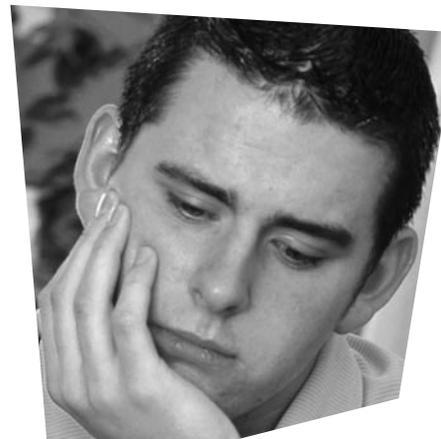
Unforgiveness in the life of a Christian is serious business and carries with it a high price tag. There are three things you need to know about forgiveness:

- a. Forgiveness is not a feeling. This is not something you do when you "feel" like it. It is an act of your will, an act of obedience to God, and has nothing to do with the person who has offended you.
- b. Forgiveness is undeserved pardon and an undeserved release. If you wait until a person asks for forgiveness or until you think they deserve it, then it is too late, because it isn't really forgiveness at all.

- c. Remember, no matter how horribly someone has treated you, it could never compare with how horrible you were to God. Your sin drove the nails through the hands and feet of His only Son, yet He forgave you completely while you were still in your sin.

Don't let unforgiveness keep you from being in fellowship with God and in a battle with depression.

There are many reasons that Christian teenagers get depressed. Depression is not something to be ashamed of. It doesn't mean that you are crazy or defective. You CAN get better and life can be good, but you must be honest about how you are feeling. Tell your parents, your youth minister or pastor, a teacher or counselor. I promise they can help you if you will let them. Your part is being honest. Jesus said that the truth will set you free. But it can only do that if you are truthful. It takes a courageous and mature person to admit that they have a problem and need help. You can do it. I know you can.



In the mean time, you must be willing to trust God in three ways:

Trust God's power and not your own strength. I Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your cares on Him for He cares for you." No matter how far down you are, God will bring you out if you will let Him. Corrie ten Boom said once, "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."

Trust God's mercy and grace. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. All of us deserve to be punished, but Jesus took our punishment for us. That is mercy. None of us deserve the unconditional love of God, but Jesus made us worthy. That is grace. Remember, there is nothing that you can do to make Him love you more, and nothing you will ever do can make Him love you less.

Trusting God means that there is hope! In Psalm 42:5 the Psalmist said, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Put your hope in God."

Hope is the antidote for depression. You can get better. God is right there where you are. The hope that you have is a God who loves you and wants to help you and heal you.

If You Are the Parent of a Depressed Teenager, Here Are Some Things You Need to Know...

Psychologist Jean Piaget says that a teenager is a person “who ponders his place in the world and struggles with his attempts to make sense of life.” That is an adult explanation of the struggles of adolescence. Charlie Brown, of Peanuts fame, probably put it best when he said, “It’s a great burden to be a young person of promise.” Either way you put it, adolescence is tough.

Depression can strike anyone, at any time in life, but adolescence is a time in life when it is easy to become bogged down in confusion, hopelessness and helplessness. This is a time of transition and tremendous growth. Adolescents are being forced to leave the secure world of childhood where parents are in control to find their own place in the “real world.” Bodies are changing, there are new and sudden emotions and energy that can all translate into a loss of self-esteem, anxiety, guilt, anger, and ultimately, depression.

Of course, some depression is predictable and even normal. But because adolescent depression has many faces, it can look typical on the surface, yet be a serious problem and a cry for help. Many times parents will write adolescent depression off as just a “stage that they are going through.” It is hard for parents to see their child in pain, especially if that inner turmoil is directed at them. Teenagers are rarely going to come out and ask for help, so parents are the ones who must intervene when it is appropriate. Depression can get out of hand fast, so it is important to understand what teens are going through and take action when necessary, before the depression develops a life of its own.

Adolescence is a very complicated time of life. Changes are coming at them fast and furiously. They are constantly being pulled between wanting independence from their parents and needing to be dependent on them. The parent they may have adored in childhood is now an obstacle to growth. It becomes babyish to allow their parents to tell them what to do or how to behave. The conflict and confusion that this struggle causes is a normal part of growing up.

When parents are no longer the ones teenagers look to for meeting their emotional needs, the vacuum has to be filled fast. Friends seem to fit this bill perfectly. It is easy to look to a kid or a group that is considered “cool” to provide the sense of identity and self-worth that they are looking for. These relationships usually tend to be very self-serving and superficial, so sometimes they end as quickly as they begin. Rejection runs rampant during adolescence.

Biologically, because of the hormones that are racing through their bodies, adolescents are more active than they will ever be again at any point in their life. They are also active because passivity implies dependence, while activity means independence. Their moods are erratic and the world of teenagers is an unstable place. Because they don’t know their own strengths and weaknesses yet, they don’t know how to handle all the insecurity.

One minute, depending on their circumstances, they feel smart, the next they feel dumb. One moment they are pretty or handsome, the next they are ugly. Cool one minute, a nerd the next. Because inside they are really scared to death, they will come across as being overly confident, talking about their big plans with a cavalier type attitude at times. They will take on “roles,” wearing what they have to, talking, walking, and acting like they need to in order to fit in and be accepted.

Adolescence is also a very self-centered time. Because they are looking for a sense of self, they don’t have room for other people and their problems. Further, they will ignore anything that doesn’t correspond with their needs or their view of the world. Whereas a child could only think in concrete terms, now as a teenager he is able to think abstractly and he will use this new skill to try to intellectually out-do his parents. Again, this is reinforcing the move to independence.

In the midst of the hormones that are raging within and the demands that are being made without, teenagers hold themselves together by focusing on getting their needs met. This self-centered attitude reduces their dependency on their parents and asserts their separateness from them. Also, activity diverts attention. Sometimes rebellion, anger, or belligerent behavior is simply a way to take the attention off what they are really feeling, which is fear and insecurity. They may yell at a parent to disguise the love that they really feel, but seems inappropriate for an independent person to express.

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In spite of all the changes and confusion, most teenagers come through adolescence with few problems. But about 20% of all adolescents do see life as empty and hopeless, and suffer from serious depression. There are many reasons that kids get depressed. Here are a few:

1. The changes that are taking place so rapidly physically, emotionally and mentally are continually attacking teenagers. The new and sometimes frightening sexual urges and the constant questioning of not only, "Who am I?" but also "Where am I going" and "Do I have what it takes to get there?" can cause depression.

2. The mood swings that sometimes cause them to fly high, can also cause them, in just a matter of hours (or minutes in may seem), to spiral downward and are exhausting. It is easy for some teenagers to get caught in one of those mood swings and not have the strength or resources to climb out.

3. The pulling away from their parents, where they have received the largest part of their self-esteem, and the draw to an untested and many times uninterested world can leave them with a deep sense of inner loss. This nagging, empty feeling that just won't seem to go away can be a major cause of depression.

4. The often selfish, surface and insecure nature of adolescent friendships is almost a guarantee that, at some point, a teenager is going to be hurt. The adolescent world is filled with rejection, and this is a very real cause of depression.

5. Depression can be a reaction to a loss — a death, a divorce, a move. Sometimes parents will unknowingly add fuel to depression fire because they, too, are stressed, depressed or full of guilt because they feel that they are the cause of their child's problem. So, instead of allowing their teen to express their feelings of loss and fear, they try to talk them out of their pain.

6. Sometimes changes that are a necessary part of growing up, graduation, for example are about fear and uncertainty as much as they are about completion and discovery. When the times in our lives that we have looked forward to and dreamed about bring us pain as well as joy, it is easy to feel guilty, confused and depressed.

7. Chronic illness can make a teenager feel different, and that adds up to feeling defective. This, combined with the normal self-doubts and insecurities that all adolescents face, can leave a kid seriously depressed.

8. Some teenagers fall prey to depression because of rejection that they have carried from childhood that has left them feeling hopeless and helpless about life. They avoid encouragement because they fear that they will only be hurt again if they allow themselves to hope that things can be better.

If depression only lasts a week or two, there is no reason to be alarmed, but if what starts out to be a normal reaction to a loss, a transition in life, or a problem becomes a way of life and they seem unable to move past their pain, then that is a different story. Even though at times they may seem to be more "up," if a minor trauma is able to send them back into the depths of despair, there is definitely a problem that needs to be addressed.

Dr. John Meeks give us seven basic symptoms of adolescent depression that come up time and again when a teenager is depressed:

- **Loss of interest** in school, sports, friends, church or activities that they previously have enjoyed. Any change that seems illogical.
- **Long-term mood changes.** This can range from irritable and angry to withdrawn and sad.
- **Any irrational behavior.**
- **Sleep disturbances.** Unlike an adult who will usually not be able to sleep when depressed, a teenager will sleep too much. They will be almost impossible to wake up in the mornings. Once they do get up, they will walk around in a fog for hours, but will usually feel better as the day progresses. A depressed adolescent will suffer from a tremendous amount of internal fatigue. Any abnormal tiredness.
- **Weight change.** Whether it is weight loss or weight gain, this is often a sign of depression. Any change in eating habits.

- **Movement disturbances.** Their movements will reflect their erratic emotions, so they can start the day feeling lethargic, only to become agitated, nervous and fidgety. Any movements that are erratic, especially at different times of the day.
- **Excessive guilt feelings.** They feel at fault for everything and exaggerate and obsess on situations. Any change in attitude toward school, friends or him or herself accompanied by sadness or self-reproach.
- **Suicidal tendencies.** Boys will only ask for help indirectly, because most believe that this is a sign of weakness. Girls will be much more open to asking for help and will be more open to discuss their feelings. Boys will not attempt suicide as often as girls, but when they do, they are three times as likely to succeed. Any suggestion or reference to death or suicide must be taken seriously.



Depression among adolescents wears many faces and may not always be easy to identify. Sometimes the teenagers who smile the biggest and achieve the most are the ones who are hurting. They may be driven to succeed and pride themselves in their ability to handle anything. They seem to fear dependency with a passion. However, beneath the surface they are not confident at all. In fact, they suffer from low self-esteem. They validate their self-worth with outside achievements, friendships and success. All the while their anxiety is building because they know that perfection is impossible to maintain. Losing can send them into deep depression because, in their mind, the only way to have worth is to be perfect. These kids can become suicidal very easily.

Then there are those who seem to be just the opposite. Success for them seems so out of reach that they don't even try. Their world is hopeless and losing is a given. They will dress, look and act dull and uninterested. Some of these kids have learning disabilities that cause them to quit trying before they ever get started. Many times these teens will be labeled troublemakers or even juvenile delinquents, when what they really are is depressed. It is just that they have been depressed for so long and it has become so much a part of them, you can hardly separate the two.

Those who appear to be loners are really depressed. They believe that there is no place for them out in the "real" world, so they go deeper and deeper into themselves. They blame their parents, their school, other kids, their country, or the world in general for what they see as their inability to fit in. They refuse to reach out and refuse to try. It is easy and less painful, they think, to blame outside forces than to look inside. When they run out of excuses and places to assign blame, their depression can get out of hand.

A depressed teenager may wear the face of the "class clown." You know, the one who may not appear to have a serious bone in his body. He makes a joke out of everything, but what he is really hiding with all the humor is depression. In the same way, "Miss Personality Plus" may appear to be everybody's friend, but in reality won't let anyone get too close, for fear that others will see the pain in her life, and how lonely she really is.

As a parent, you may be feeling confused and estranged from your teenager. However, the support you give them at this crucial time can have a tremendous impact on their life and on their future happiness and success. You may feel as if you are doing everything possible to help, and don't know what else to do. You may be totally frustrated and feel like giving up. If your teen is in trouble emotionally you need to gather the family around and give him or her the family's full attention. Adolescent depression is a family problem.

It is not a curse, it is an illness that can be cured. Run, don't walk, to the nearest Christian counselor you can find. The entire family needs to be involved in getting your hurting teenager help. More importantly, a family whose members communicate with one another and who listen and respect one another's feelings can do more than any counselor or doctor could ever do. Do what you have to. With your support and the right help, your teen will get through this. There is hope, even for the hopeless.

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