



When a parent or caregiver is depressed

Answers for kids

YOU MIGHT HAVE A LOT OF QUESTIONS WHEN someone in your family is sick. If your parent or caregiver has depression, you may feel like no one wants to talk about it. When you look for answers, the information from friends or other sources can be incorrect or even scary.

When talking about mental health, it's important to be open and honest. In this pamphlet, we'll try to answer your questions. We'll also give you some places where you can talk to someone or read more about depression.

What is depression?

- Depression is an illness that affects how a person feels, thinks and acts.
- Our brains help us to think, feel and act in certain ways. So when people are depressed, they think, feel and act differently than when they're well.
- Depression is not a weakness.
- Many people have depression at some point in their lives, even though people don't always talk about it. Talking about depression can help and make it seem less scary.

What causes depression? How does it start?

- Depression is an illness, in the same way some people have diabetes or asthma.
- For some people, it's just the way their brain works, like how some people have allergies and others do not.
- Other people may get depression after something difficult happens in their lives.
- You are not the cause of your parent or caregiver's depression.
- We are still learning more about what causes depression.

Why does my parent or caregiver act the way they do?

- Depression causes people to act in ways that are different from how they usually act:
 - They may seem tired, uninterested in things, impatient, more annoyed and angry, or sad.
 - They may cry a lot, spend a lot of time in bed, or get frustrated and angry.
 - They may do or say things that make you feel bad or confused.
 - When your parent or caregiver is acting differently, it is not your fault. Depression makes a person have feelings that are hard to manage.
 - Even though depression may change how your parent or caregiver acts, it does not change how they feel about you.

How does it feel to be depressed?

- Depression can affect people in many ways:
 - They may get tired more easily.
 - They may have trouble concentrating.
 - They may worry a lot more than they usually do.
 - They may have a negative attitude about life or themselves.

- They may feel that nothing is exciting and that they can't enjoy things they used to.
- They may have body aches and pains, stomach upset or headaches. They also may feel more or less hungry than usual.

Will the depression ever go away?

- Depression is very treatable—75 to 85 per cent of adults treated for depression get better.
- Sometimes the depression comes back, but it can be treated again.
- Some people have depression their whole lives. Through support from family, their community or treatment, they can live full, meaningful lives.

How can my parent or caregiver get better?

- Many different treatments are available, including medicine and talk therapy:
 - Medicine makes the chemicals in the brain work better, and that can help the person who is depressed think, feel and behave more like themselves.
 - Talk therapy gets people who are depressed to talk with a therapist about what they are experiencing. It helps them learn new ways to cope and to think, feel and behave in ways that keep them healthy.
- Some people may find other things that work for them, such as light therapy, exercise, meditation or wellness practices used in their culture. Doing more activities that make them feel good can also help.
- Some people combine different aspects of treatment to find what works best for them.

Is there anything I can do to make my parent or caregiver better?

- Support from family is important to people with depression, but adults, not you, are the ones responsible for helping your parent or caregiver get better.
- There are doctors and therapists who treat depression, and this treatment can help your parent or caregiver. Your parent or caregiver may also draw support from a religious leader, elder or other respected community member.
- Sometimes it will help your parent or caregiver just to know that you are there. You can do simple things to show you care, like giving them a card or photo, or talking with them on the phone if they are away recovering.

Will it happen to me? Will I get depression too?

- No one can know for sure if they will get depression at some point in their lives.
- It's natural to worry about this. Just like other illnesses, having depression in your family might put you at an increased risk, but then again, it might not. We don't really know.
- It's more important to focus on what you can do to help yourself deal with stress and lead a healthy life.

Can I catch depression?

- No. Depression isn't like a cold. There's no germ, and it's not contagious. There is no way of catching it.
- You could hang out with someone who is depressed without getting depression yourself.
- You may feel upset while your parent or caregiver is depressed, but people often feel sad during difficult times. This does not mean you have depression.

Can my parent or caregiver die from depression?

- Unlike some illnesses, depression doesn't stop the body from working, although your parent or caregiver may feel sore or lose their appetite.
- People with depression feel different things, and some people may want to hurt themselves. Other people with depression never want to hurt themselves.
- There are times when people with depression might feel so bad that they say things like "I want to die." This is really upsetting to hear. It might be hard to know what to do when your parent or caregiver says these things.
- Some people who talk about dying or hurting themselves never act on it. It's just a way to express how bad depression makes them feel.
- Other people with depression do try to hurt themselves or end their lives. But many people with depression never have this experience.
- If you think your parent or caregiver may hurt themselves or isn't safe, call emergency at 9-1-1 or call the 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline to talk to someone who can give you information and support. You can also reach out to another adult who will help make sure your parent or caregiver is safe.

How can I cope with my feelings?

- Sometimes you may need to talk with someone who can help you understand your feelings. This is okay. We all need help with our feelings sometimes, and it's healthy to let other people in your life know what you're going through. Sometimes even just talking about your feelings can make them a little easier to feel.
- If your feelings start to become really difficult for you, try calling a kids helpline or talking with a doctor or therapist. Some cultures may also have religious leaders or elders you can speak with during these times.
- Participating in sports, hobbies and other activities with healthy adults and kids can help you have fun and feel good about yourself.
- When someone around you is feeling bad, you might think your own feelings aren't important. This isn't true. People around you want to know how you are feeling, whether it is a parent, family member, teacher or doctor.

What can I do if I'm struggling with how I'm being treated?

- It can be hard to live with a parent or caregiver who has depression. They may do or say things that make you feel scared, sad, angry or confused. But usually depression does not cause people to hurt others.
- You never deserve to be treated badly, even if someone is sick. You deserve to be safe and cared for.
- If someone ever hurts you, confide in someone you trust or call the Kids Help Phone at 1 800 668-6868.
- You can also make an action plan to keep you and your parent or caregiver safe. Action plans can use the template from Kids Help Phone (see "Other resources"). You can also make your own plan that includes:
 - the name and phone number of an adult you can call
 - phone numbers of your parent or caregiver's doctor or an emergency line you can call
 - a safe place or an activity you can do
 - steps to take in an emergency.

Need someone to talk to?

Kids Help Phone

1 800 668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868
kidshelpphone.ca

Canada's 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline

Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling or texting 9-8-8 anywhere in Canada.

988.ca

Other resources

Kids Help Phone

"My Fill-in-the-Blanks Safety Plan"

Visit kidshelpphone.ca

Can I Catch It Like a Cold? Coping with a Parent's Depression

This book, in story format, answers questions about depression and is an ideal starting point to discuss the disorder. You can order copies through our online store or pick up copies in the RBC Patient and Family Learning Space (see column to the right).

More information about depression for children and families

- Speak to your family doctor.
- Call the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at 416 535-8501 (select 2).
- Visit the CAMH Family Resource Centre (see column to the right).

For more information on addiction and mental health issues, or to download a copy of this pamphlet, visit our website:
www.camh.ca

For other formats of this pamphlet, to order multiple copies or to order other publications, contact CAMH Publications:

Toll-free: 1 800 661-1111

Toronto: 416 595-6059

publications@camh.ca

store.camh.ca

If you have questions or feedback about services at CAMH, contact the Patient and Family Experience (PFE) Office: 416 535-8501, ext. 32028; pfe@camh.ca

Family members can access the Family Resource Centre (FRC) and the RBC Patient and Family Learning Space (PFLS) for support, resources and help connecting to services.

1025 Queen St. W. (McCain Complex Care and Recovery Building)

FRC: 416 535-8501, ext. 32028; pfe@camh.ca

PFLS: 416 535-8501, ext. 33995; pfls@camh.ca; www.camh.ca/pfls

To make a donation, please contact the CAMH Foundation:
 416 979-6909
foundation@camh.ca

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