



# Jericho High School's Psychology Corner

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## Depression: Is it more than teenage angst?

The goal of the Jericho High School's Psychology Corner's publication is to promote healthy minds for the Jericho community. For last October's National Depression Screening Day, information was made available to the community about children and adolescent depression (Please see: <http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/docs/2009.10.01-Depression.pdf> ). Depression is the most common mental illness among adolescents (Cash, 2005). Since its symptoms can easily be considered part of the "normal tumult" of adolescence (e.g., unstable behavior, shift in mood), it is common for individuals to be untreated (Cash, 2005). In this second publication regarding adolescent depression, parents will be provided with information about the common reasons adolescents may feel depressed, statistics surrounding the disorder, and practical tips to help prevent depression in our teens.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), adolescent depression is a disorder that occurs during the teenage years, and involves ongoing sadness, discouragement, loss of self-worth, and loss of interest in usual activities. Adolescents who have a low self-esteem are highly self-critical, and who feel little sense of control over negative events are particularly at risk to become depressed when they experience stressful events. An estimated 8% of 12-17 year-olds experienced at least one major depressive episode during the past year. In addition, suicide is the third leading cause of death in 11 to 18 year olds (Information obtained by Teen Screen, National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University). Although depression is a multifaceted disorder, the following are some common reasons adolescents experience depressed moods:

- The typical process of maturing and the stressors associated with those changes
- The influence of hormones
- Conflict with parents over independence
- Reaction to a disturbing event, such as:
  - The death of a friend or relative
  - A breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend
  - Change in social group
  - Poor academic performance

## How can parents help to prevent teen depression?

According to information provided by the Mayo Clinic, parents may be able to help prevent teen depression by promoting their child's physical and mental health. Research has shown the following steps can make a difference:

**Praise your child's skills-** Children who struggled academically in core subjects in first grade were more likely to display negative self-perceptions and symptoms of depression in sixth grade. Meet with teachers to find out how your child is doing in school. If your child is having trouble in school, be sure to praise his or her other strengths.

**Participation in organized activities-** Research shows that playing team sports or taking part in other organized activities can help prevent teen depression by boosting a child's self-esteem and increasing his or her social support network. Encourage your child to get involved in extracurricular activities.

**Physical activity-** Physical activity can improve your child's overall health. The Department of Health and Human Services recommends adolescents get one hour or more of physical activity a day.

**Parental support-** Researchers suggested that the link between low family income and childhood depression might be explained by exposure to stressful events such as divorce or separation or low levels of parental support. Higher levels of parental support seemed to offer protection from depressive symptoms. Remind your child that you care by listening, showing interest in his or her problems, and respecting his or her feelings.

**Talk to your child-** One of the early warning signs of teen depression is a sense of isolation. Set aside time each day to talk to your child. This step can be crucial in preventing further isolation, withdrawal and progressive depression.

If you are concerned about your child, it is important to contact your health care provider or mental health professional. Prior to meeting with the health care provider/mental health professional, the Mayo Clinic recommends the following practical suggestions:

- Write down any symptoms your teen has had, including any that may seem unrelated to the reason for which you scheduled the appointment.
- Write down key personal information, including any major stresses or recent life changes your teen has experienced.
- Make a list of all medications, vitamins or supplements that your teen is taking.

As always, please contact me if you need additional support or guidance at [dlargotta@jerichoschools.org](mailto:dlargotta@jerichoschools.org) or 516.203.3600 ext.3265.

### References

Cash, Ralph E. (2005). When it hurts to be a teenager. *Principal Leadership*, 1-5.

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National Institute of Health. (n.d.). In *Adolescent Depression* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved September 29, 2010, from National Institute of Health database: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001518.htm>