

# Is it depression or just the blues?

**Let's be honest: high school comes with lots of emotions.** So many things in your life are changing, from school to friends to hormones—you may be wondering whether what you're feeling is all normal or something more. This quiz can help you sort out warning signs of depression from normal cases of the blues. If you're worried about a friend, encourage him or her to take this quiz, too.

**1.** Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you felt sad, hopeless, guilty, anxious or worthless?

- a) almost all day, every day
- b) a few times
- c) no more than once or twice

**2.** How has your ability to concentrate and pay attention been lately?

- a) Not great—I've been having a hard time focusing on school, homework, etc.
- b) I have times when my mind wanders, but it's not getting in the way of my grades.
- c) I haven't noticed any changes.

**3.** Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you spent time with friends or done activities you enjoy?

- a) hardly at all—I just don't feel like it
- b) maybe a little less than I used to
- c) too many times to count!

**4.** How have your sleeping and eating habits been lately?

- a) I'm eating and/or sleeping way more or way less than I used to, almost every day.
- b) I've noticed some changes, but I'm still keeping up with everything and my weight hasn't changed.
- c) Fine—I eat well and feel rested.

**5.** How has your energy been over the past 2 weeks?

- a) low—it's hard to even get out of bed
- b) OK—some highs and lows but nothing major
- c) I feel great!

**6.** How do you feel about the future?

- a) I can't see anything good happening.
- b) I'm worried about some things (grades, getting a job, etc.) and looking forward to others (prom, graduation, etc.).
- c) I'm really excited about all of the possibilities the future holds.

## If you answered...

### mostly a

You may be experiencing depression. Only a health-care provider or mental health professional can say for sure. Reach out for help. (See page 5.) Treatment can get you back to feeling more like your usual self!

### mostly b

Any sadness you're feeling is probably just part of life's ups and downs. Keep an eye out for worsening symptoms. Get help if you need it.

### mostly c

Sounds like your life is pretty good right now! Your moods and outlook on life are normal. We wish you continued good health!

# SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

It has taken scientists and mental health experts hundreds of years to understand depression. Even today, there are a lot of false ideas out there about the illness. We're here to separate the myths from the facts.

**MYTH:** DEPRESSION IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.

**FACT:** Depression is a medical illness, not an issue of "mental strength." Scientists have found physical changes in the brains of people with depression. Imbalances in brain chemicals (neurotransmitters), genetics and other factors may also contribute to the illness.

**MYTH:** TREATMENT DOESN'T REALLY WORK.

**FACT:** Medication, counseling or a combination of both can help reduce or get rid of symptoms in most people with depression. Some people may have to try more than one thing before figuring out what works for them. Fortunately, there are lots of different options available, including special treatments for people who don't get better with medication.

**MYTH:** IF YOU THINK SOMEONE HAS DEPRESSION, YOU SHOULDN'T BRING IT UP. THAT WILL ONLY MAKE THEM FEEL WORSE.

**FACT:** Talking to a friend or family member about depression can be the best way to help him or her. It can encourage the person to seek treatment and realize that depression isn't something to be ashamed of or to hide. In fact, talking about depression can be so beneficial, it's actually a common treatment option—called "talk therapy." This involves working with a counselor or therapist to learn ways of managing symptoms, including negative thoughts and feelings.

**MYTH:** MOST THREATS OF SUICIDE ARE JUST A CRY FOR ATTENTION.

**FACT:** All threats of suicide should be taken seriously. By the time a person talks about harming him- or herself, he or she is desperate for help. If someone you know talks about suicide, get help immediately. Talk to a parent or another trusted adult. If the person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number **right away**. (See page 11 to learn more.)

steps can be to talk to him or her about what you've seen. Consider Pedro's story:

*"Some guys were harassing my friend Lucas at school, calling him a 'fag' and stuff. I knew it bugged him a lot. I could see his moods getting lower and lower. Then he tried to give me a bunch of his favorite comic books one day. That got me worried, so I said, 'Hey, I know things have been tough lately. Are you thinking of hurting yourself?' He broke down and said he just couldn't take it anymore. I told him that he wasn't alone and I'd help him find a way to get the bullying to stop. He agreed to go with me to the counselor's office. He's getting treated for depression now, and things are slowly getting better. I don't want to think about what could have happened if I didn't say something."*

Like Pedro's story shows, it's OK to talk to a person about suicide. It won't put ideas into his or her head. Instead, it will open the door for the person to talk honestly about how he or she is feeling.

If someone admits to feeling suicidal or you are concerned about warning signs you've seen, encourage the person to seek treatment. For example:

- Offer to go with the person to talk to the school nurse or counselor, or his or her parents.
- Put the person in touch with the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).
- Call 9-1-1 or your local medical emergency number if the person is seriously considering suicide and won't get help on his or her own. Stay with the person until help arrives. If you're on the phone or online with him or her, keep communicating.

### ***Get help when you need it.***

If you are ever facing suicidal thoughts, take quick action. Reach out to a parent, another trusted adult or a friend. Talk about how you are feeling and that you need help. If the person doesn't take you seriously, ask someone else. Or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline listed above. Remember, depression can be treated. You can feel better. And your life **does** matter!



## HELPING A FRIEND IN NEED

### DO'S AND DON'TS FOR TALKING ABOUT DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Having someone to talk to can make a world of difference for someone struggling with depression. Just keep these tips in mind:

- **DON'T** be afraid to ask questions to find out how a person is really doing. For example, it's OK to ask "Have you ever thought of hurting yourself?" or "Do you ever feel like giving up?"
- **DO** believe what the person tells you and take it seriously.
- **DON'T** make light of the person's feelings (for example, by telling him or her to "cheer up" or saying that everyone feels sad sometimes).
- **DO** tell the person you care about him or her and want to help.
- **DON'T** keep secrets about suicidal talk, thoughts or actions.
- **DO** reassure the person that things can get better. Treatment can help.
- **DON'T** ignore a threat of suicide even if the person has threatened it before and not followed through.

Above all, **DON'T** go through it alone. Reach out for help!