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When
Talking
About

Depression

and Other Mental Health Disorders

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS, AND CAREGIVERS

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“When I feel like I’m getting stressed, I shift my attention and energy into a different direction,” she says.

If her depression does come back, Chamique says she’ll recognize it early and get help.

“I just take one day at a time,” she says.

“Like my mom. She had alcoholism. She gave me one of her pins for being clean and sober, and I still keep it in a sense to take one day at a time. So it’s the same thing. They’re both illnesses.”

Some see depression as a weakness, and don’t ask for help. Chamique sees it another way.

“It’s a sign of *strength* to go and get help.”

Chamique’s words to young people

“You may not feel you can turn to anyone, but believe me, I was the same way. I was, like, no one’s going to understand. Then I found someone that really understood where I was coming from, and it helped me so much.”

Consider This

Jeanne Blake: Depression isn’t just a phase of feeling blue or down. Someone who’s depressed experiences a range of intense symptoms that last weeks or months.

“It’s a sign of strength to go and get help.”

Chamique

Dr. Prince: Adolescents are often moody. But when a child has ongoing and worsening difficulties at school, at home, and with friends, parents should be concerned and seek professional advice. Luckily, Mike was able to get help in time. But Chris and Ronnie regret that he suffered alone for so long.

Jeanne Blake: Mike cut himself. Why do people engage in self-injury?

Dr. Prince: People injure themselves for various reasons. Mike felt so overwhelmed he'd do anything to distract himself from his emotional pain. Others who cut are so numb they'll cut just to feel *something*.

Jeanne Blake: Mike was ashamed that he was cutting himself, and felt so desperate that he asked to go back to the hospital.

Dr. Prince: Cutting is a sign of deep distress. People engaging in self-injury need to be evaluated by a professional to figure out what's going on: Is this person depressed? Is he or she suicidal?

Jeanne Blake: Most people who die by suicide are depressed and have not been treated for their illness. Depression affects the way you think about yourself and how you view the world. Hopelessness is a common symptom.



“Cutting is a sign of deep distress.”

Dr. Prince

Opening up to Wellness

FACT: Bipolar disorder is a serious mental illness characterized by recurring depression, increased irritability, severe insomnia, grandiose thoughts, racing thoughts, markedly increased energy and activity level, poor judgment, and inappropriate social behavior or a combination of those symptoms.³



James

In school, James became disruptive. He couldn't concentrate, and his grades dropped.

James started to change after he turned 13.

He told his parents something was wrong. They said that feeling moody was typical for teens. "I'm sure I hugged him and moved on," his mom Brenda says.

In school, James became disruptive. He couldn't concentrate, and his grades dropped. Other kids were targets of his temper. "I'd go off on my best friend for nothing," James says. "Then a half hour later, I'm crying to the guy, saying I'm sorry."

James was out of control at home, too. The holes in his bedroom walls marked his violent outbursts.

"I would plead with him to stop," Brenda says. "My greatest fear was that he would hurt himself."



“It’s not one symptom that makes the diagnosis, but a persistent pattern of intense mood swings along with other symptoms, that leads to the bipolar diagnosis.”

Dr. Wozniak

at some point. When you or someone you love is suffering from severe psychiatric symptoms, whether the cause is bipolar disorder or something else, you should take advantage of everything modern psychiatry and psychology have to offer, which is a lot! Otherwise, the symptoms can ruin your life.

Jeanne Blake: Since moodiness is typical of adolescence, may one symptom more than others indicate bipolar disorder?

Dr. Wozniak: Adolescence can include irritability and times of sadness, but this moodiness is generally short-lived and not intense. Most of the day, almost every day, most typical adolescents function well, academically, with friends, in activities, and with family. Adolescents with bipolar disorder are just the opposite: most of the day, almost every day, for days in a row, they have problems with the typical teenage activities of schoolwork, friendships, and getting along with parents. Irritability, hyper or high moods, and depression lead to outbursts, rage, isolation, or reckless activities. It’s not one symptom that makes the diagnosis, but a persistent pattern of intense mood swings along with other symptoms, that leads to the bipolar diagnosis.

Jeanne Blake: Why is bipolar disorder often difficult to diagnose?

Chaos to Clarity

FACT: Schizoaffective disorder symptoms look like a mixture of two kinds of major mental illnesses: schizophrenia and either depression or bipolar disorder.

Chris wanted to design bridges. So, at age 18, he entered a university to study civil engineering.

After he graduated, when he was studying for his Master's degree, he started to hear voices and see things that weren't really there.

The voices were the first sign that Chris was mentally ill. He would later learn that he had schizoaffective disorder, which included psychosis (a loss of contact with reality), and mania and depression (high and low moods). Psychosis is a symptom of both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

"I assumed the voices were normal," Chris says. "But my view of normal was very distorted."

He began to ignore his studies. Instead, he decided to solve global warming. "I had no skill to take this on, but I thought I could fix it," he says.



Chris

"I assumed the voices were normal. But my view of normal was very distorted."

Chris

Jeanne Blake: Schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are often confused during the early stages of diagnosis.

Dr. Goff: The first obvious signs of both illnesses may be psychosis, which may include hallucinations (voices or visions) and delusions (firmly held false beliefs). Psychosis is usually continuous in schizophrenia until treated, whereas people with bipolar disorder are only psychotic now and then during episodes when their mood is high (manic) or low (depressed).



Jeanne Blake: What causes psychosis?

Dr. Goff: There are many causes. Most result from chemical imbalances in the brain, which may be the result of the psychiatric illness, or may be caused by something in the environment. In people who have a genetic vulnerability, stress or using street drugs can produce psychotic symptoms. For example, we know that using amphetamines or cocaine can cause psychosis in some people as a result of the release of too much of the chemical dopamine. PCP, also known as “angel dust,” can also cause psychosis by disturbing the chemical glutamate.

Jeanne Blake: Family support such as Chris has is important for people living with mental illness.

“Family support such as Chris has is important for people living with mental illness.”

Jeanne Blake