

Watch for signs of depression in kids

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In today's world, toughness and glamour rule, especially if you are a teenager. Teens who buy into the myth that image is everything risk losing it all when they experience a letdown, a rejection or a broken heart.

Teenage girls are more vulnerable to this serious form of the blues than are teen boys. The majority of depressed adolescents are teenagers, girls between the ages of 12 to 19. Girls are more open emotionally and tend to talk about it more. Boys, for the most part, have more physical outlets for stress and emotions than do girls.

Depression in contemporary teenage girls are fourfold:

- the zooming divorce rate;
- the message our culture sends about sex;
- the increase of violence and abuse against children and women; and
- increasing teen addiction to drugs and alcohol.

A big factor in depression in young people is the breakdown of the family or divorce. It's hard on teenagers when their primary support system, the family, is gone.

For a female, she gets a lot of identity from her father and he isn't there to guide her or talk to her or tell her how pretty she is. Missing a mother figure can be just as terribly damaging to young people.

Attitudes about sex are a toxic societal factor driving teen girls into depression. The culture sends a mixed message to girls. Sex is something sacred, but on TV, sex is what's selling and there's too much pressure to be attractive to the opposite sex.

Over-emphasizing female sexuality causes girls to focus on their bodies, rather than on their intelligence, ability or spirituality. This lends to girls finding fault with themselves and each other if their appearance doesn't measure up.

Body image

The gold standard for an adolescent girl is to be slim and sexy. Girls have become more likely today than ever before to internalize society's message and "scapegoat" peers who don't meet that standard.

Failure to be thin and beautiful can lead to depression in teen girls who place exaggerated value on appearance. Teen girls' concern with appearance may occur in part because looks seem to be all society recognizes them for. This also can lead to eating disorders and self-mutilation in girls who are trying to regain the control over themselves that they feel they have lost.

Girls already brainwashed to believe that their bodies are their most valuable commodity are likely to become involved in casual sex, which in turn can trigger depression.

One cause of depression in girls is peer pressure to fit in. Their friends are having sex, so they get involved in sex out of loneliness and wanting to be accepted. They give sex to get love, and if the relationship ends, they're thrown into depression.

Depression treatable

Depression is widespread among our teens, especially girls, who are most vulnerable to peer pressure. The assuring news about depression is that it's treatable.

Watch for signs, such as:

- a marked downturn in mood;
- negativity;
- sleeplessness or sleeping too much;
- a drastic change in eating habits; and
- self-isolation.

These symptoms usually last for more than two weeks. A lot of parents don't realize what's going on and they think it's normal moodiness.

A network of educators and professionals in our community can serve as a safety net for young people in the brink of an emotional breakdown, but the primary responsibility for our young people rests with the parents.

Parents, be aware, get to know your children and talk with them. And when you sense something isn't right, make the decision for your child to seek professional help.

Read more: <http://www.guampdn.com/article/20131109/OPINION02/311090007/Watch-signs-depression-kids>