



SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

April 30th, 2013

Help, I'm Depressed!

It isn't just a bad day. Depression is a sadness that doesn't just disappear.

College can be a difficult adjustment for students. Do you remember what it was like? Never before had you changed your address, your food, your roommate, and decided what classes to take.

When depression settles in, it can be like carrying a backpack full of bricks on top of all the other requirements at college. There may be a lack of pleasure in anything previously enjoyed. Emails go unanswered. Video games go unplayed. New clothes go unpurchased.

Depression can include thoughts of hopelessness and even suicide. Depression is often accompanied by disturbances of appetite and sleep (eating or sleeping drastically more or less than usual), lack of attention and focus and feelings of sadness unrelated to things that may be going on in life (family conflicts, ending of a relationship).

It can be difficult to figure out the difference between persistent sadness, homesickness and depression. Talking to a counselor or psychologist can help students sort out these symptoms to better assess the severity of their problems. There may be times the depressed feelings are related to events occurring in life or are being caused by the adjustment to college. It may be that depression has been a recurring problem that was manageable in high school, but the stress of college and being away from home is pushing it beyond what can be handled.

Thoughts on Getting Help for Depression

- 1) **The first session is always the hardest.** Students worry the therapist will have them lie down on a couch and have the student talk about their mother. Students worry the counselor will judge them, think they are crazy and send them off to a locked psychiatric ward if they talk about suicide. They worry their parents will find out. These are all normal concerns that face students who come to therapy the first time to discuss their feelings. Encourage them to express their concerns to the therapist or psychologist. It can help.
- 2) **Who are all of these people?** *Psychologists* have a doctorate and don't prescribe medication. *Professional Counselors* are often master's-level trained and also don't prescribe medication. *Social workers, Pastoral counselors and Marriage and Family therapists* also work with students and have master's or doctoral degrees. *Psychiatrists* are medical doctors who specialize in medication management, but don't have the same training when it comes to talk-therapy. Anyone students see should have a license to practice in the state where they live. The license should be on the wall of their office or available if requested.
- 3) **People can be jerks.** This applies to anyone, including a psychologist or therapist. One would hope advanced schooling and training would fix all of these personality issues, but unfortunately that is not the case. Accordingly, be aware that the first therapist or psychologist the student meets may not be a perfect match. Encourage the student to try another one if they don't connect.

- 4) **Medication can be part of the answer, but it isn't the whole answer.** Be wary of anyone who sells medication as a "fix all" for the symptoms of depression. Medication can help. Recent studies, however, have shown that exercising three times a week can have a similar effect. For some, medication can be life changing. For others, it isn't helpful or the side effects outweigh the positive impact. Each person's reaction to medication varies. It may be that the first medication a student tries isn't the best match for them. It may be that medication in general isn't for them. Encourage the student to work with their therapist to come up with different options.
- 5) **It takes time.** It often takes months or years to sink into depression severe enough for a student to seek professional help. Likewise, it can take time for depression treatment to show some positive impact. Many students begin to feel better after their first session; some take a few sessions to start to feel a change. If treatment seems to be going to slowly, encourage the student to talk to their therapist about medication or develop an exercise routine to help amplify the effects.

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