

Here are some common myths—and the facts behind them—about depression:

The Myth: All young people get depressed. It's just a normal part of growing up.

The Truth: Feeling sad or unhappy is a normal part of growing up. In fact, it's a normal part of the ups and downs of life, no matter how old you are.

Depression, however, is more than just feeling sad. It's feeling miserable or upset to the point where it gets in the way of your day-to-day life for two weeks or longer. Depression is an illness like asthma or diabetes. It can affect people at any age, and it needs to be recognized and treated.

The Myth: If you're depressed, it just means you're going through a tough time at the moment.

The Truth: Tough times—like a break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or your parents' divorce—can lead to depression. The tough time is not necessarily the only factor involved. A physical illness, feelings of loneliness or isolation, being bullied or abused can all lead to depression. And, sometimes depression can have no obvious cause at all, but it could be the result of chemical imbalances in the brain.

We all deal with stuff differently. Some of us have stronger coping skills or support systems to help us through tough times, and some no matter how sharp our skills or strong our supports, still need extra help.

So whether you're going through a tough time or experiencing depression, it's important to talk to someone and get the help you need.

The Myth: It's normal for young people to want to spend lots of time on their own.

The Truth: Sometimes it's nice to chill out and have some alone time. However, if someone isn't spending as much time with friends and family as they used to, or if they've dropped out of the crowd or aren't doing the things they used to enjoy, then it might be that they aren't feeling great and are at risk of depression – or are depressed.

The Myth: Telling an adult that a friend is depressed is betraying that friend's trust. If someone wants help, they'll get it themselves.

The Truth: Depression saps energy and self-esteem, so it can get in the way of a person's ability to ask for help when he or she really needs it.

If you're worried about someone, it's far better to share your concerns with a trusted adult like a parent, teacher, supervisor or counselor or other mental health professional. No matter what you promised to keep a secret, someone's life is more important than a promise.

The Myth: People who are smart or emotionally strong don't get mental illness.

The Truth: Mental illness, including depression, can affect anyone. It doesn't matter how smart a person is. It doesn't matter if a person has a strong character, if they're old or young, or if they're male or female.

But there are some aspects of a person's personality that can help prevent depression. Being optimistic, having good problem-solving skills and high self-esteem, having close relationships with people you can turn to for support, and being involved in school or community activities can help decrease your risk of depression. It's important to note that these things don't guarantee you won't get depression, but that they reduce the risk.

The Myth: You're born either an optimist or a pessimist. You can't change how you think.

The Truth: One of the most effective treatments for depression is called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT involves targeting negative thoughts you might be thinking, like: "I'm not good enough" or "I'm not going to get better" and changing those negative thoughts to positive ones. CBT helps you learn different and more positive ways to respond to what's happening in your life. In severe cases, medication may be required alongside CBT to correct chemical imbalances in the brain.

The Myth: All depression needs to be treated with antidepressants.

The Truth: For mild to moderate depression, the first choice of treatment should be counseling. The issues you're facing might be worked out through talking about the issues. But if your depression is severe, your counselor or other mental health professional will probably refer you to a psychiatrist for further evaluation to determine if medication is warranted.

It's important that you get along with and trust your counselor and psychiatrist, so you can work with him or her to find a treatment plan to keep you well.

The Myth: Just talking and listening to your friends and family will be enough to treat depression.

The Truth: Talking and listening to your friends and family is a really important way to deal with the day-to-day ups and downs of life. However, if you think you might be experiencing depression, it is important that you seek professional help. Talk to a trusted adult, your doctor, or your school counselor about the choices available.

The Myth: Binge drinking is just a normal part of growing up and does not have an impact on depression.

The Truth: Binge drinking can put you at greater risk of depression. If you are depressed, alcohol consumption and binge drinking can exacerbate the symptoms.

The Myth: A medical doctor is the best person to speak to if you think you might be depressed.

The Truth: A medical doctor is a good person to talk to about depression and the treatments available, but not all doctors will necessarily be as good as others in diagnosing, talking about and treating depression. It might be more helpful for you to speak with a trained counselor, psychiatrist or psychologist about your depression. Your doctor can refer you to one of these. Check out the Finding help section for more information on who you can talk to about your depression.

If you think you need help immediately, call the 24 hour crisis line for Heartland Human Services at 217-342-5504 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. Both of these hotlines are free and staffed 24/7 by trained volunteers who can listen to you and connect you with mental health providers in your area.

The Myth: People who are depressed need to wake up and stop feeling sorry for themselves.

The Truth: People don't choose to be depressed. Depression is an illness, and as such, it can be treated with the right help from mental health professionals. It's not something that people can just "snap out of." Knowing how to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression in yourself and others, and getting help early can help reduce the long-term effects of the illness.