UNDERSTANDING
MENTAL ILLNESS
IN YOUR FAMILY

for young people who have a family member with

Depression

A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

BC SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY FOUNDATION
SUPPORTING THE BC SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

This booklet was adapted from materials developed by Sabin Sebastion MD, Birmingham, Alabama and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

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"I can't understand him, he keeps getting sad and gloomy for no reason or for little things!
It's scary! It makes me frightened sometimes. I love my dad but this is hard."

- Ian

"It's such a drag! I love softball and I made the school team. I was hoping my brother would come and watch my games. But he looks so miserable that he doesn't find anything interesting.
I wish I knew what to do."

- Jasmine

"When's mom gonna get well?
Daddy says she's ill. Daddy says mommy is not feeling well, that is why she cries a lot and does not play with me much anymore."

- Eric

So what is happening with all these family members?
They all have an illness called:

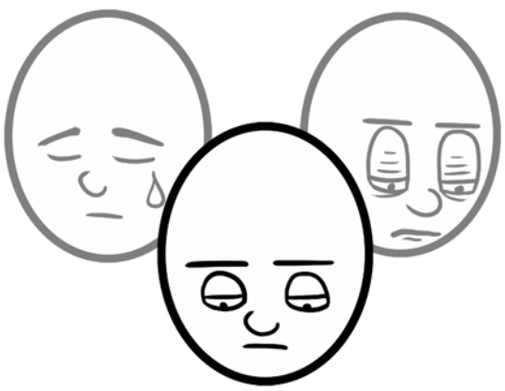
Depression

That's a pretty big word, right?

Don't worry! When you are done reading this, you will know as much, or even more than some grown-ups about **depression**.

***First, let's find out what it means to have* depression.**

I am sure there have been times when you felt like crying... or actually did. **Maybe you lost something, or you were scared, or you didn't get what you wanted.** *In any case, it's not much fun to feel sad and not be able to enjoy things.*



Imagine if you became sad and unhappy for no reason, or for reasons that didn't make you feel sad before. **You don't want to feel this way, but you do – yikes!** *Then imagine if your friends no longer wanted to be around you, because you are no fun anymore.*

What if you wanted to feel better and start having fun again, but you couldn't.

You decide to watch a movie. *No, you can't concentrate.*

You decide to get to that next level in the video game.
It doesn't seem interesting anymore.

You decide that a nap will do you some good,
but you can't get a good sleep.

An ice-cream perhaps?
No, it doesn't taste good anymore.

Some friends come over to invite you to a party,
but the thought of it just makes you feel more upset…

So what's happening here?

These are some of the things that can happen to someone when they have an illness called depression.

Depression is an illness of the brain that changes the way a person feels and behaves.

*When someone has **depression**, they might feel very unhappy for long periods of time for no reason.*

They might have very low energy and lose interest in the things they used to enjoy like hobbies and spending time with family and friends.

They might feel no good at anything and think that things will never get any better.

Sometimes these feelings get so bad that someone with depression might start to drink alcohol or use drugs to try to feel better. *But this can make things worse.*

Sometimes people with depression feel so bad that they might think about suicide.

This probably sounds really scary, but there are treatments that can help people with depression feel better.

If you are worried about your family member, talk to an adult you trust about your worries.

Commonly Asked Questions

If you find yourself with lots of questions about ***depression****, you're not alone.*

Here are some questions people often ask:

What causes depression?

Just like the body, the brain can get sick too, but you can't catch **depression** from someone else like you catch a cold.

Mental illnesses like **depression** are caused by a combination of different things.

A person's genes can make them more likely to develop ***depression****.*

Genes are the **building blocks** that make us **who we are** and determine things like the **colour of our hair or eyes**.

If a person has genes that make them more likely to have depression, things that happen to them in their life can add to this and cause them to have ***depression*** *or make the illness worse.*

For example, if someone goes through a difficult event like the death of a loved one or a car accident.

Will I get depression?

Just because you have a family member with depression, this does not mean you will get depression.

If you are worried about yourself or notice any changes in your thoughts, feelings or behaviour, talk to an adult you trust.

Commonly Asked Questions

Is it your fault? Absolutely Not!

Sometimes kids wonder if they did something to make their family member ill or if they could've done something to stop their family member from having **depression**.

But it's important to remember – kids are not the cause of these illnesses! ***Depression*** **is no one's fault.**

Will they get better?

Just like many other illnesses, there are ways to treat **depression**.

There are medications that help people with **depression** feel better. **Sometimes it can take a while to find the right one, but doctors can help people find the medication that works best for them.**

Counselling or therapy can also help people with depression understand their illness and learn new ways to deal with problems.

People with depression often have to take treatment for a long time. *They may become ill, get better, become ill again and then get better again.*

Even though depression may sound like a scary illness to have, with treatment, people with depression can feel better.

Wow, we have learned a lot. Now you know more about what your family member with depression is going through.

Remember

Here are some important things to remember if someone in your family has a mental illness like depression...

It's not your fault

No one can cause another person to have a mental illness.

Your feelings are okay

You may have a lot of different feelings. It's okay to feel sad, lonely, angry, confused or however you feel. Other people feel the same way.

Talk to someone you trust

Share your feelings with someone you trust – a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, counsellor or teacher.

Take care of yourself

Find things you enjoy doing. Play a sport, read, bake, dance, make art, spend time with friends, anything you find fun that helps you relax.

It can get better

With medication and help from doctors, counsellors, family and friends, people with mental illness do get better.

It's no joke

People should never make fun of mental illness.

Knowledge is power

It can be helpful to learn more about mental illness, so you understand what is happening for your family member. Then it won't seem so scary or confusing.

Remember the Three C's

I can't **C**ause it
I can't **C**hange it
I can **C**are for myself

Where Can I Learn More?

The following resources have more information about mental illness and how to cope when someone in your family has a mental illness:

Kids & Teens in Control Groups
Support and education groups for children and youth ages 8-18 who have a family member with mental illness.
bcss.org/kidsincontrol

COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness)
Information and videos about mental illness for young people who have a parent with mental illness.
copmi.net.au/kids-young-people

BC Schizophrenia Society
Information about schizophrenia and other mental illnesses.
bcss.org

HeretoHelp
Information and resources about mental health and substance use.
heretohelp.bc.ca

Need Help?

Kids Help Phone
Call *1-800-668-6868* or Text *CONNECT* to *686868*
kidshelpphone.ca

KUU-US Crisis Line – First Nations and Indigenous specific crisis line
Call *1-800-588-8717*

YouthinBC – Online crisis chat service
youthinbc.com

Crisis Centre Suicide Line
Call *1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)*

Things I Can Do To Help Myself

In an emergency I can call:

If I need someone to talk to I can call:

If I am looking for information I can call:

One person I can go to for help is:

Times when I may need help:

Things I can do to help myself feel better:

Notes

For more information on supporting families with mental illness, please contact:

British Columbia Schizophrenia Society
1100 – 1200 West 73rd Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6P 6G5

Phone: **604-270-7841**
Toll Free: **1-888-888-0029**
Email: **info@bcss.org**
Website: **www.bcss.org**

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