

This month's spotlight: Depression

There are many factors that can affect a person's vulnerability to developing depression such as family history, time of the year, and life experiences. Individuals who have family members with a history of depression may be at greater risk for developing depression themselves. In addition, during the winter months when the weather changes and there is less sun people can be more likely to experience depressive symptoms. Dealing with difficult life experiences (e.g. death of a loved one, lack of contact with a parent, homelessness, witness to violence, etc.) can also increase a person's risk for depression.

Depression affects men and women of all ages, incomes, religions, races, and nationalities. Depression is typically thought of as feelings of sadness, however, it is important to know that in children and teens, depression can look more like irritability than sadness (remember though that some irritability is a normal part of teenage behavior). See below for a list of some symptoms commonly associated with depression.

- sadness
- irritability
- feelings of hopelessness and/or worthlessness
- feelings of loneliness
- withdrawal from friends and family
- loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- decreased energy and motivation
- change in sleep habits (e.g. increased sleeping or difficulty falling and staying asleep)
- thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or death
- dramatic changes in eating habits (e.g. over-eating or under-eating)
- physical complaints (e.g. headaches)

If you know someone who develops 3 or more of the above symptoms and experiences them most days for a period of two weeks or longer you should contact a mental health provider or your doctor. If you know someone who currently has thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or death (regardless of whether or not they have other symptoms mentioned here) you should contact a mental health professional for support.

The Multnomah County Crisis Line (503-988-4888) is a 24 hour mental health helpline that you can call with mental health questions, concerns, or if dealing with a mental health emergency. If you know someone currently dealing with thoughts of suicide you (or they) can call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 for support 24 hours a day. If you have mental health questions or topics you would like to see featured in this column, feel free to email me at stacy_bancroft@reynolds.k12.or.us.