

More Than Feeling Blue

FINDINGS ON DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

From the March 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington, Virginia

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest link to their health.

This brochure looks at the results on persistent signs of depression and suicidal intentions from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students.

It also suggests ways to get help if you (or a young person you know) show signs of depression.

WHAT ARE DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS?

“Depressive symptoms” refers to feelings of sadness and hopelessness that:

- Last for two weeks or more;
- Interfere with a young person's usual activities, such as school, sports, or hobbies.

Depression is like all the happiness has drained out of you. Life is dull, grey, meaningless. You don't enjoy anything, even things you used to love.

-Anonymous

DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS ARE COMMON – AND A CONCERN

Nearly one-fourth of the young people in Arlington who took the 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported depressive symptoms. Among girls, the figure was higher – 29 percent compared to 19 percent of boys.

Children and youth with depressive symptoms may have depression – a serious, debilitating but treatable disease that can:

- Interfere with a young person's normal activities, friendships, and schooling;
- Put the young person at risk for substance abuse and suicide.

In 2010, five percent of young people in Arlington reported that they had attempted suicide in the past year. And two percent had made more than one attempt.

WHO'S AT RISK?

While young people of all backgrounds report depressive symptoms and thoughts of suicide, some groups are more likely to experience them. In particular:

- ✓ Girls are more likely than boys to report depressive symptoms and to seriously consider and attempt suicide.
- ✓ Older youth (in 10th and 12th grade) are more likely to report depressive symptoms than those in 6th and 8th grade. However, young people in 8th and 10th grade were most likely to report attempting suicide.

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2850 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Only one percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

FEWER AT-RISK SINCE 2001

Since 2001, the first year that the YRBS was administered in Arlington, there has been a significant reduction in the percent of youth reporting depressive symptoms and suicide attempts. Nationwide, the percentage of high school youth who attempted suicide decreased from 2001 to 2009.

KEY FINDINGS

In 2010, significantly fewer youth reported depressive symptoms and suicide attempts than did in 2001. Current data show that:

- ✓ Among youth in 6th grade, 20 percent reported depressive symptoms; 9 percent seriously considered suicide; and 4 percent attempted suicide.
- ✓ Among youth in 8th grade, 19 percent reported depressive symptoms; 12 percent seriously considered suicide; and 5 percent attempted suicide.
- ✓ Among youth in 10th grade, 30 percent reported depressive symptoms; 15 percent seriously considered suicide; and 6 percent attempted suicide.
- ✓ Among youth in 12th grade, 29 percent reported depressive symptoms; 9 percent seriously considered suicide; and 4 percent attempted suicide.
- ✓ Among youth in high school, 2 percent made more than one suicide attempt. One percent made a suicide attempt resulting in medical treatment.

DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND OTHER RISK BEHAVIORS

Depressive symptoms seldom occur alone. Among Arlington youth who reported these symptoms, 90 percent reported at least one other risk behavior. Young people with these symptoms were also more likely to struggle with school work. Only 68 percent reported getting mostly A's and B's compared to 77 percent of those without these symptoms.

DEPRESSION IS TREATABLE

Depression is a serious medical illness but it can be treated. Families should seek professional help as soon as possible. Talk to a school counselor, doctor, or mental health professional. Usually, the earlier depression is treated, the better the chances of recovery and preventing its return.

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

Like adults, all children and teens feel “down,” have a bad day, or feel sad once in a while. But if these feelings last a long time or interfere with the child’s normal activities and friendships, they may be signs of clinical depression. Experts recommend that you talk with a doctor or mental health professional if your child or adolescent shows any of the following symptoms for more than two weeks:

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, or crying
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Lack of energy, enthusiasm, motivation, or ability to concentrate
- Withdrawal from friends and activities such as sports or hobbies
- Major changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Increased irritability, agitation, or hostility to parents and friends
- Unexplained aches and pains, such as stomach aches or headaches
- Poor performance in school or a decrease in grades
- Recurring thoughts or talk of death, suicide, or self-destructive behavior

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about depression in children and adolescents, go to these Web sites:

Depression in Children and Adolescents (National Institute of Mental Health) at www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/depression-in-children-and-adolescents.shtml

Depression in Children and Adolescents Fact Sheet (National Alliance on Mental Illness) at www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=88551

Adolescent Depression (New York Times) at <http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/adolescent-depression/overview.html>



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