

This month, **BRYAN GOH** speaks to a ex-sufferer of depression and how she overcame it.

# AM I TOO E'MMO?

**“My friends thought I was too emo.”**



**F**or one girl, what seemed like mere misery turned out to be something far more serious which she did not suspect she suffered from – Depression.

Allie (not her real name) was 16 year old when she had her brush with depression. Preparing for her ‘O’ Levels at that time, the stress of trying to do well took its toll on her. However, this was not the only factor that sparked her depression: “I wasn’t very close to my family and could not share much with them about my life. This left me bottling up a lot of things in me.”

A close friend of Allie’s was also molested by her stepfather, which added more stress onto Allie. She recalled, “When that happened to her, I was at a loss as to what I could do about it. I wanted to help her, yet it seemed there was nothing I could help with.”

Her other friends also started drifting away from her due to differing views towards the molest: “Our common

friends didn’t seem to care. They wanted me to be more positive about it, but in my mind, I was wondering how they could actually be so upbeat about things despite what happened.”

“Before long I became very solitary, very alone.”

## NOT THE SAME PERSON

“I used to be very energetic and lively, but after everything happened, I became very quiet. I would not talk much, and would just try to pretend as if everything was okay. I even felt that it wouldn’t make much of a difference if I got hit by a bus or took pills.”

However, it did not occur to Allie that she could be suffering from depression. She brushed it off as ‘thinking too much’, yet she was losing sleep over everything. “I could not share it with my parents too, and my friends were sick of me being in that state of things. They thought I was too emo.”

According to Ms Carolyn Kee, Senior Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health, Allie’s reaction is common. “Sufferers sometimes do not realize that they could possibly be suffering from depression and just hope that the misery they’re feeling will just go away. However, such emotions do not just go away.”

Despite her boyfriend’s support, Allie just couldn’t stop thinking of all the things happening in her life. “I was constantly plagued by all the thoughts about all the unpleasant things in my life. And I started having suicidal thoughts. I couldn’t concentrate in class, and I was also eating a lot. I was also very sleep-deprived as I just could not sleep at night.”

Finally, Allie decided to see her family doctor after realising that she was sinking in deeper into melancholy. Her doctor subsequently advised her to see her school counsellor.

However, Allie was apprehensive: “I was afraid. I thought being depressed meant that I was going crazy. And I

didn't want everyone to know I was seeing the counsellor, because I did not want to feel like I was different."

Upon the urging of a good friend, Allie finally took the plunge and visited the school counsellor. This turned out to be a good move on her part as speaking to the counsellor allowed her to vent her pent up frustrations.

Allie's counsellor later confirmed that she was suffering from depression.

## TEEN DEPRESSION

Allie is not the only teen depression sufferer - Contrary to the popular belief that only adults suffer from depression; it affects people of all ages and all walks of life, including youths.

A local community survey using a locally derived rating scale for depression in adolescents showed that depression occurs in 2% to 2.5% of the adolescent (aged 13-19) population. This roughly translates to 2 sufferers of depression out of every 100 youths in Singapore.

However, depression is fully curable: "With proper treatment, a person can recover from depression. How the person progresses from that point on depends on how he subsequently views himself, others and the world around, how he copes with challenges, as well as the social and interpersonal support that he has," said Ms Kee.

## BRIGHTER FUTURE

For Allie, the half a year of counselling reaped much benefit as her condition improved. Today, Allie is a much happier person and no longer suffers from depression. "From that time onwards, I learnt to ignore all the negativity surrounding my life, and would try to follow what my counsellor taught me. I've learnt to deal with my emotions, and have been constantly reminding myself that there is more to life than my problems."

Allie mused, "One thing I regret is that I did not seek help earlier. If I had done so, things would not have exploded and probably would not have become so dire. At the same time, I've also learnt to say no at the right time. I used to always place my friends before myself, to the extent I got too involved sometimes. Now, I know how to deal with things better."

However, Ms. Kee cautioned that being cured does not necessarily mean

that a person is free from depression forever: "A person can suffer from a relapse after being treated, and it can happen when circumstances change in the person's life and the person is not able to cope with it adequately."

"In such cases, the skills learnt while

being treated might have been forgotten or not used, or perhaps not sufficient to deal with the new and more challenging life event. The person would then need further treatment to hone and equip him or herself with the right skills to cope with the new situation." ❧

## What is Teen Depression?

Teen Depression is identified by the persistent sad feelings that affect the adolescent in ways they cannot handle. This changes the way the person thinks about things and the way he feels. The teen will also be prone to irritable moods and sleeping complaints.

### CAUSES OF TEEN DEPRESSION

While causes can vary from person to person, it mostly stems from the stress resulting from environmental factors. Some common causes include:

- ❶ Deteriorating school results
- ❷ Parents going through divorce or are in conflict
- ❸ Poor relationship with peers and bullying by peers
- ❹ Facing serious punishment for delinquent acts

### SYMPTOMS

- ❶ Decreased energy and concentration
- ❷ Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- ❸ Significant change in appetite or body weight
- ❹ Lack of interest in things once enjoyed
- ❺ Emotional outbursts
- ❻ Feeling that no one cares
- ❼ Frequent vague, non-specific physical complaints
- ❽ Recurrent thoughts of death/suicide

### HOW TO AVOID THE DEPRESSION TRAP

- ❶ Keep fit and healthy by eating, sleeping and exercising well.
- ❷ Be kind to yourself and others. Everyone makes mistakes and that's okay.
- ❸ Acknowledge and accept your feelings. It's okay to feel angry, disappointed or jealous.
- ❹ Maintain a balanced outlook on things. Try to see the upside of things as well.
- ❺ Maintain a network of family and friends that you can find support in.
- ❻ Take time to reflect on things in life that you can be grateful for.

If you are feeling depressed, here's where you can seek help:

❶ **Samaritans of Singapore**  
www.samaritans.org.sg  
24-hour helpline: 1800 221 4444

❷ **YouthLine**  
Helpline: 6336 3434  
Operational hours: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm