

## **What is Depression?**

It is common for individuals to feel sad, down, or discouraged from time to time. Usually, such emotional experiences pass within a few hours or days and do not significantly impact our ability to attend to daily responsibilities. Depression, however, can last nearly most of the day for long periods of time and may make it difficult to go to class, work, or spend time with loved ones. As opposed to feelings of sadness, depression is an illness that affects your body, mood, and thoughts. Depression is not a sign of weakness or a condition that can be resolved through will power. Without treatment, depression can worsen and last for weeks, months, or years.

## **Symptoms of Depression**

Depression can be different for everyone; however, there are common symptoms associated with depression. If you have been experiencing any number of the symptoms listed below for two or more weeks, talking with someone at the Counseling Center can help. As opposed to diagnosing yourself, it is important to meet with a trained professional regarding the symptoms of depression that you or others in your life have noticed.

- Feeling sad or empty
- Frequent crying
- Diminished interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping
- Feelings of restlessness or being slowed down
- Difficulty attending to work, school, or social responsibilities
- Fatigue
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, low self-esteem, or pessimism
- Guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death
- Frequent thoughts of suicide or making a suicide attempt

## **Coping with Depression**

Since depression often involves low energy and feelings of hopelessness, individuals may not feel like seeking the help they need. However, it is important to seek help immediately because depression, even in its most severe forms, is treatable and a trained professional can assist you in coming up with a treatment plan. Treatment plans for depression are based on the individual's presenting concerns, and may include group or individual psychotherapy, medication, psychoeducation, and other strategies. Students who may wish to consult with a counselor at the **Counseling Center** can make an appointment by calling **312-996-3490** or by stopping by the front desk at **1200 West Harrison Street, 2010 SSB, Chicago, Illinois, 60607** between our regular business hours of 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM.

Outside of professional help, practicing good self-care can assist in effectively coping with depression. Effective self care includes:

- Getting enough rest.
- Exercising. Engaging in regular physical exercise releases endorphins in the brain and can improve mood.
- Eating healthy.
- Spending time with friends or family. Social support is often said to be the best anti-depressant.
- Avoiding drugs or alcohol. Though drugs and alcohol might provide temporary relief, they typically add to feelings of depression.
- Attend social activities that you once enjoyed even if you do not feel like doing so. Research shows that mood will often follow behavior; in other words, doing something that use to make you happy might help to eventually improve your mood despite initial disinterest in the activity.

**References:**

American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, Text Revision. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2000.