

Identifying Depression in Adolescents

Adolescent depression, with a point prevalence of 3% to 9% and a cumulative prevalence of 20% by the end of the teenage years may result in severe morbidity and mortality.

Major depression in adolescents is recognized as a serious psychiatric illness with extensive acute and chronic morbidity and mortality. Research shows that only 50% of adolescents with depression are diagnosed before they reach adulthood. In primary care, as many as 2 in 3 depressed youth are not identified by their primary care clinicians and do not receive any kind of care. Even when diagnosed by primary care physicians, only half of these patients are treated appropriately.

Depression often permeates an adolescent's social life, family relationships, and academic performance. Depressed adolescents face increased hospitalizations, recurrent depressions, psychosocial impairment, alcohol abuse, antisocial behaviors, and, of course, suicide.

However, despite available treatments, studies report that only one fourth to one third of adolescents with depression receives treatment.

The problem of under diagnosis and referral might be improved if an assessment of suicidality and depression became a more formal part of routine pediatric care.

The use of appropriate screening instruments could improve detection rates and reduce reliance on a skilled psychosocial interview. Screening instruments could be completed in the waiting room, creating a time-efficient manner of inquiring about the adolescent's psychiatric state.

To obtain a referral for the patient to see a behavioral health provider, please contact NHP Behavioral Health Services at 1-866-969-2661. Also, we have provided some links that will be helpful to you in identifying depression in adolescents.

Glad PC Toolkit – Guidelines for Adolescent Depression in Primary Care
(*Clinical Assessment Flowchart Page 16 and Modified PHQ – 9 Pages 62 and 63*)
<http://www.glad-pc.org/documents/GLAD-PCToolkit.pdf>

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.gov

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml>

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<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/>