

Dealing with Depression

A Biblical and Christian Guide for Teens

If you need help right now. If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life, please tell a trusted adult right away. You can also call or text 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or text HOME to 741741 (Crisis Text Line). This guide is educational and does not replace professional support when it is needed.

Why This Matters

If things have felt heavy, gray, or flat for a while, and you cannot point to one clear reason why, you are not broken and you are not alone. Depression affects teens more often than most people realize, and it is not a sign of weak faith or not trying hard enough. It is a real experience, shaped by brain chemistry, life circumstances, and sometimes both, and it responds to real help.

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:11, NIV) is written by someone in the middle of real despair, asking his own soul an honest question. Scripture does not skip past this feeling. It names it directly.

A Heart-Level Invitation

Consider: when the heaviness sets in, do you tend to pull away from people, push through while pretending it is fine, or let someone know what is going on?

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18, NIV) describes nearness, not distance, from someone in this kind of pain.

What Depression Can Look Like

Ordinary Sadness

A hard day, a disappointment, or a stretch of feeling down after something difficult happens is a normal part of life. This kind of sadness usually has a clear cause and tends to lift within a few days as life moves forward.

When It Needs More Support

A low, heavy mood most days for two weeks or longer, losing interest in things you used to enjoy, big changes in sleep or appetite, constant tiredness, trouble concentrating, or any thoughts of death or self-harm are signs this has moved beyond ordinary sadness. These are signs to tell a trusted adult, counselor, or doctor, not signs to manage alone.

Depression and the Way You Think About Yourself

Depression rarely stays only a feeling. It reshapes the way you think, especially about yourself. Confidence drops, and thoughts that once passed through quietly get replaced with harsher, more permanent-sounding versions: “I'm not good at anything,” “No one wants me around,” “Nothing is ever going to get better.” These thoughts do not feel like symptoms. These thoughts are interpreted as facts, but they are not. They are inaccurate thoughts.

Depression often shows up as derogatory self-statements, calling yourself stupid, worthless, or a failure inside your own head, as pessimism, expecting the worst outcome

before anything has happened, and in its heaviest form, something closer to self-hatred, a settled sense that you are the problem. None of these thoughts are new information about who you are. They are a symptom of depression working the way depression works, convincing you of things that are not true.

Paul offers a different practice, not by pretending hard things are not real, but by choosing where attention goes: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (Philippians 4:8, NIV). This is not a call to ignore real struggles. It is a practice of redirecting attention away from a distorted loop and toward what is true, especially on the days your mind insists otherwise.

When a harsh thought about yourself shows up, it helps to ask: is this true, or is this depression talking? Naming the difference, out loud or on paper, is often the first step toward loosening the thought's grip.

Simple Tools for Dealing with Depression

- Name It: instead of saying “I'm fine” on autopilot, name specifically how you feel and what feels heaviest right now.
- Take Small Actions: depression convinces you nothing will help, but small actions, getting up, going outside, reaching out to one person, often shift things more than waiting to feel motivated first.
- Watch the Inner Voice: depression's self-talk is often harsher and less true than it feels in the moment. Notice thoughts like “I'm worthless” rather than accepting them automatically.
- Stay Connected: isolation feeds depression. Reaching out, even briefly, interrupts the downward pull.
- Tell a Trusted Adult: especially if the heaviness does not lift, or if you notice any thoughts of self-harm.

You Don't Have to Carry This Alone

Depression works to convince you that no one would understand, or that reaching out would not help. Both of those are the depression talking, not the truth.

- Prayer: bringing the heaviness to God as it is, the way Psalm 42 does, matters more than presenting Him a version that sounds more put-together.
- A Trusted Mentor: a youth leader or other Christian adult who checks in regularly can notice things you might not say out loud on your own.
- Youth Group and Church: showing up, especially on the days you do not feel like it, keeps you connected to people who can carry some of this with you.
- Scripture: verses like Psalm 42:11 or Psalm 34:18 are worth returning to often, especially on the hardest days.

Getting Started

Name how you are feeling this week, not the “I'm fine” version. Tell one trusted adult or friend the real version this week.

Noticing What Is Strengthening

Directions

Read each statement and select the response that best fits how this has been for you recently.

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1. *How often:* I notice when I am saying “I'm fine” instead of naming how I feel underneath it.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

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2. *How often:* I take small actions, getting up, going outside, reaching out, even when I do not feel motivated.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

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3. *How true is this for you:* I notice harsh self-talk, like “I'm worthless,” without automatically believing it.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

4. *How often:* I ask myself whether a harsh thought about myself is true, or whether it is depression talking.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

5. *How often:* I stay connected to people rather than isolating when I feel low.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

6. *How true is this for you:* I can tell the difference between an ordinary hard day and something heavier that is not lifting.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

7. *How true is this for you:* I bring my sadness to God as it is, rather than pretending it is not there.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

8. *How often:* I tell a trusted adult when this heaviness does not lift.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

9. *How much do you agree:* I am willing to talk to a counselor or doctor if this feels like more than I can manage.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Strongly Disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neutral · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly Agree

10. *How true is this for you:* If I have thoughts of hurting myself, I tell a trusted adult or call for help right away.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

11. *How much do you agree:* I am open to learning new ways to work through depression.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Strongly Disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neutral · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly Agree

Why Consistency Matters More Than Intensity

One good day does not mean this is over, and one hard day does not mean you are failing. Working through depression tends to happen through small, repeated practices, staying connected, taking small actions, telling someone when it is heavy, more than through one breakthrough moment.

“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22–23, NIV) describes a renewal offered daily, which fits a struggle that often needs to be faced daily too.

A Prayer to Begin

> “Lord, thank You for staying close even when everything feels heavy and gray. Help me tell someone when I am struggling instead of hiding it. Give me small steps I can take today, and help me believe You are near, even on the days I cannot feel it. Amen.”

Six Practical Guidance Principles

1. Name What You're Feeling, Not Only “Fine”

A specific feeling is easier to work with than one you have not named.

2. Take Small Actions Before You Feel Motivated

Waiting to feel like it first often means waiting a long time. Small action tends to come first.

3. Notice Harsh Self-Talk Without Believing It Automatically

Depression's inner voice is often louder than it is true.

4. Stay Connected Instead of Isolating

Depression grows in isolation. Reaching out interrupts it.

5. Tell a Trusted Adult When It Doesn't Lift

Persistent heaviness is a signal to get support, not a signal to manage it alone.

6. Bring the Heaviness to God, Not Only to Yourself

Prayer is a real place to set down what feels too heavy to carry alone.

A Closing Encouragement

“Why, my soul, are you downcast?... Put your hope in God” (Psalm 42:11, NIV) was written by someone who did not have this figured out yet, and wrote it down anyway. Depression can lie and tell you this feeling is permanent or that no one could help. Neither is true. Reaching out is not weakness. It is one of the strongest things you can do.

Suggested Resources

For those who want to go deeper, these resources offer additional insight into depression and how to work through it:

> Anderson, N. T., & Baumchen, H. (1999). Finding Hope Again: Overcoming Depression. Regal Books.

> Minirth, F., & Meier, P. (1978). Happiness Is a Choice. Baker Books.

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