



## **Assess Further**

### **Assess for Depression**

Among adolescents, depression may present a variety of psychosomatic symptoms or behavioral problems instead of the classical vegetative symptoms often seen with adults. The following symptoms suggest depression if they have been present for two weeks or longer and if they represent a change from previous functioning (adapted from American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM IV). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994):

- depressed mood;
- fatigue, lethargy, and loss of energy;
- loss of interest in school, life, fun, friends, and diminished pleasure;
- weight loss or gain when not dieting, loss of appetite;
- poorly defined headache, chest pain, or abdominal pain;
- low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness;
- insomnia or hypersomnia;
- psychomotor agitation or retardation;
- diminished ability to think or concentrate;
- poor school performance, truancy;
- preoccupation with death and/or suicide; and
- sexual acting out, substance abuse or delinquency.

If an adolescent gives a positive response to any of the initial questions, or if any of the symptoms listed above are noted, the provider should assess further to determine the severity of depression and the adolescent's risk for suicide. It is generally accepted that there is a substantial comorbidity of depression and other psychiatric conditions, including alcohol and drug abuse and eating disorders. If indicated, a depressed adolescent should be evaluated for these problems as well.

Follow-up questions are designed to help the provider assess the level and possible etiology of the depression. Providers should note that adolescents whose parents are clinically depressed or who have other psychiatric disorders and adolescents who live in dysfunctional families are known to be at increased risk for developing depression and other psychopathology.

### **Follow up Questions**

1. Is there a reason you feel down or depressed?
2. Have you suffered any recent losses or disappointments (romantic, academic, or athletic)?

3. How long have you felt this way?
4. Do you feel helpless or hopeless?
5. When did you last have fun? (Probe) What was it?
6. Does anyone else in your family have these types of problems?
7. Have you had any trouble with the law?

### **Health and Functional Consequences of Depression**

1. Has your weight or appetite changed?
2. Have you had trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up?
3. Have you been too tired lately?
4. Have your grades dropped lately?
5. Have you been having conflicts with your family, friends, or other adults or teens?
6. Have you had any physical problems that won't go away?

### **Social Support Systems**

1. Who can you talk to about your problems?
2. Do you have close friends/have you lost any friends lately?
3. Can you talk to your parents/family about these problems?

### **Assess Risk for Suicide**

The majority of suicidal adolescents are depressed; many suicidal adolescents do not give evidence of depression. When providers uncover depression or other risk factors for suicide, they should query the adolescent further to determine possible causes for these thoughts and if the adolescent has devised a suicide plan.

1. Have you had any motor vehicle accidents lately?
2. Have you or any of your friends ever tried to hurt or kill themselves?
3. Has anyone in your family ever tried to hurt or kill him or herself?
4. Do you have a plan now for how you would hurt or kill yourself? What is it?
5. How does the future look to you?
6. What would you do if things don't get better for you?
7. Do you have concerns about your sexual preference? About where you fit in?
8. Have you started or increased your use of medications (sleeping pills), alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs?
9. Is there a gun or other weapon in your home?

### **Physical Examination**

When adolescents present symptoms of weight loss, fatigue, and loss of energy, they should have a comprehensive physical examination in order to rule out organic illness. This examination includes assessing for hypothyroidism, inflammatory bowel disease, and adverse reactions to prescribe medications.

Adapted from Levenberg PB, Elster AB. *Guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services (GAPS) Clinical Evaluation and Management Handbook*. 1996. Chicago: American Medical Association.