

# The secret life of the depressed teenager

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“ You cry...

you feel sad... you get ‘ help’..

. but it’s still there... only now you hide it.

.. you want everyone to believe it is ok...

but it’s not, I’m not ok- it’s a rollercoaster of emotions, you slowly start to feel better and then all of a sudden you crash again... then it starts all over”(“ Depression Quotes” 3). It’s easy to read this quote by the teenager Mallisa, but it’s hard to understand it. Depression is a foreign thought for some of us.

It seems almost insane to think that a person could take their own life, but for Mallisa and many other teens just like her, the battle with depression is real. Mallisa, and other teenagers just like her are keeping quiet about their illnesses for many reasons, some being that they think that what they’re feeling will go away if they can simply wait it out, others feel like nobody would understand anyways, and some are simply embarrassed, and don’t want to be associated with the stigma of mental illness. “ I never understood why there is a point to living when no one understands the pain that you feel. What is the point of enduring this everyday pain just to be somewhere that you aren’t wanted and no one cares” (“ Depression Quotes” 7). Kassie is teenager just like the rest of us, except Kassie has depression and she represents one of the main reasons that 2/3 of people with depression don’t get help (qtd. in “ Quick Numbers” 1).

Kassie, just like many other teenagers, believes that nobody understands exactly what it is she goes through every day. She isn't alone in this though. In the book, *Will's Choice: A Suicidal Teen, a Desperate Mother, and a Chronicle of Recovery*, Gail Griffith is able to tell the story of her own depression, her son's depression, and the dark times of his girlfriend, Megan. In a letter to Will, after his failed attempt at suicide, his stepmother wrote to him about her own sister whom had depression, she wrote: My sister says, remembering her own despair, that no matter how close and supportive your family is, when you are in the throes of mental illness you don't think anyone on the "outside" can understand what you are going through. For her, what helped over time were good medication, a great psychiatrist, and an amazing support group. She still relies on all of that, and she's more than OK with that.

(qtd. in Griffith 41) This is simply another tragic example of how those with depression believe that they are alone in their battle. According to the National Institute of Mental Health one of the symptoms that comes along with depression is feeling misunderstood, which simply reinforces the idea that some teens are quiet about their depression for fear that nobody understands exactly what they're going through (3). While feeling like those on the "outside" just don't understand what kind of pain a person with depression is going through, there are still other reasons why some people keep mum about their illness. "I never believed in depression and thought it was something I could fight off on my own with will power" ("Two Blocks Over" 7). This quote exemplifies that some people with depression actually

believe that they don't need help, or that their depression is just a phase that will eventually pass.

That isn't true though. Suicide is the third leading cause of teenage death, and these numbers are built up so high because teens are becoming too far in over their head with depression (" High School Statistics" 1). Depression is a serious illness that requires treatment, and one of the reasons that people don't seek treatment is that they feel like if they give it a bit of time they will eventually feel better (" What's Stopping You" 1). In fact, according to Erik Nelson, a doctor, and associate professor of clinical psychiatry at the University of Cincinnati Academic Health Center, depression will worsen the longer it goes untreated (" What's Stopping You" 1). While this is one of the main reasons that people are quiet about their depression, there is yet another reason, which is probably the saddest of all.

" I'm completely ashamed of it [depression] because most people don't understand it. People who haven't experienced it will usually just tell you to ' get over it and cheer up' but it's not that easy" (" Being Embarrassed or Ashamed" 1). For some people, being depressed is embarrassing. Whether they're embarrassed by the lack of understanding in the general public, or the stigma attached to a mental illness, their embarrassment is keeping them quiet about their depression. Julie A. Fast, a leading mental health expert, wrote a short article on the stigma surrounding depression (" About Me" 1).

Fast wrote that people with depression believe that they should be able to correct their mood themselves which leads to the embarrassment of having

to get help, as if they aren't strong enough (1). Laurel Wiig, Ph. D. wrote another article on the same topic. Wiig wrote that those with depression can sometimes be afraid that they might be perceived as being weak, and they don't want to let family members down, especially if they've always been considered strong this leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment (1).

This is just another sad reason that people with depression aren't speaking out against the ghosts that are haunting them. In America, about 20% of teens experience depression (" Teenage Depression Statistics" 1). According to this statistic, out of the 5, 705 students attending one of Red Lion's schools, around 1, 141 will experience depression (" Red Lion Area School District" 1). Neither the varsity cheerleading captain nor that boy who is always eating by himself is safe from depression. While about 1, 141 students at Red Lion are being affected by depression, the other 4, 564 stands idly by, almost oblivious to the growing illness amongst their peers. Those with depression are lost in the crowded hallways, and their voices go unheard.

Through compassion, and understanding our society of those on the " outside" can help those who have fallen into depression. It might not happen fast, but changes can, and will be made to this world. Maybe, all the change will start through a post on a blog, or a unification of several people, or an article, but some way, somehow, change will be accomplished. Depression is big, but we are bigger, and we can beat it. It's time to stop ignoring the problem, and face it head on. By voicing our help, we help the voices of others.

These people, they're human, they're here, and they need our help.