

# Depression & Suicide Awareness



College is a time of transition for many young adults. "With transition comes a great deal of stress - with relationships (family and friends), education, living and academic environments. Stress is often (but not always) a precursor for experiencing depression. While some students come to college having already experienced an episode of depression, other students don't know what the symptoms of depression are. The college atmosphere and activities such as alcohol and drug use, as well as lack of social support and sleep deprivation may also contribute to developing symptoms of depression. Not all people who feel sad or appear "depressed", have depression. We have included some information in this handout to help you better identify when someone may be experiencing the symptoms of depression, how to express that you care and want to help that person, and some ways to respond in case you have concerns about suicide which is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students.

## What is Depression?

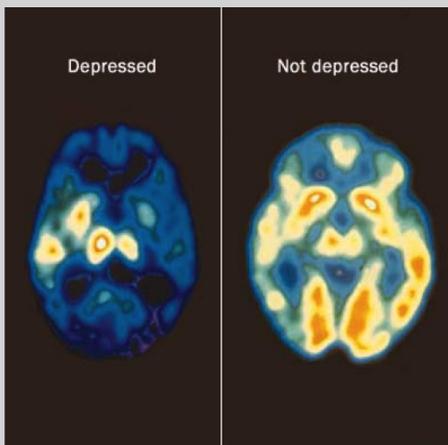
Depression is NOT:

- A person ("She is depressed" or "I'm so depressed")
- Sadness/grief
- Weakness or laziness

Depression IS:

- A brain-based medical condition; often coincides with external stressors
- A set of symptoms that impacts ability to function (school, relationships)
- Common among college students, especially women

The picture of two brains is included below - one is depressed and the other is not. Can you see the difference in terms of activity in the brain?



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## Did you Know?

**1 in 10** college students will experience an episode of depression (women report two times more) and **2/3** will never seek treatment yet **80%** would experience improvement if they did.

## Symptoms of Depression:

**At least 2 weeks of:**

Depressed/sad or irritable mood

**And 5 or more of the following:**

Changes in sleep patterns

Appetite/weight increase or decrease

Low energy/fatigue

Loss of interest/motivation in important activities and people

Problems with concentration or memory

Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or hopelessness

Thoughts of death or suicide

**And...**

Symptoms interfere with school, work and relationships

## How Will you Notice it?

You may observe the above listed symptoms yourself. You may also notice that the symptoms may be impacting the member's schoolwork, relationships, or involvement in Theta. You may see the member using alternative/unhealthy coping behaviors such as the following:

- Alcohol or drug use (increased quantity or frequency, tolerance, blackouts, injuries)
- Shopping, gambling
- Sexual behaviors
- Self-injury
- Over-exercise, restricted eating, vomiting, laxative use, etc.

# Prevention: Before Problems Occur

**Definition of Prevention: Actions taken in advance in order to decrease the likelihood of problems.**

We encourage your chapter and leaders to spend time thinking about how you can prevent problems before they occur. Below are a list of tips for both individuals and for your chapter on how individuals can reduce their risk from depression as well as ways that the chapter can provide support for prevention.

## Chapter Tips: How to help members prevent symptoms and provide support to members

### Risk factors:

- Genetics
- Decrease in sleep
- Alcohol and drug use
- Poor stress management strategies

### Ways to help and create a supportive environment:

- Educate members about depression (symptoms and risk factors)
- Participate in National Depression Screening Day
- Teach members how to manage stress (specific skills for stress reduction)
- Model positive coping behaviors such as sleeping, exercising and responsible alcohol use
- Talk about counseling and health services to help reduce stigma
- Step in when you notice risk factors

## What Thetas Experience and Believe about Helping Others:

**69%** of Thetas witness someone who seems to be struggling with severe stress, depression, or anxiety that is getting in the way of their every day activities at least a few times a semester.

**98%** believe that it is the responsibility of their sorority sisters to be supportive of members experiencing severe stress, depression or anxiety.

**98%** believe that it is their personal responsibility to be supportive of members experiencing severe stress, depression or anxiety.



# Intervening & Responding to Problems

**Definition of Intervention: Paying attention to the warning signs of developing problems and taking immediate action to change the situation when a problem is identified.**

There are several ways to help someone who appears to be struggling with severe stress, depression or anxiety.

**When:** As early as possible! Repeatedly, if needed

**Where?** In private in one-on-one or two-on-one conversations

**How?** Name the symptoms you notice, use "I" statements and messages such as "I'm concerned about you" and "I want to support you"

**Don't:** Diagnose, minimize, argue, accuse or judge

## Responding in Member Development Committee:

Many Theta collegians and advisors are unsure how to respond in MDC when they are concerned about a member's well-being, however, we also need to hold the sister/member accountable for her actions. Here are some general tips as you approach these situations:

### Before the MDC meeting:

- Contact campus resources to get guidance on what resources are available at your campus
- Find out if mandatory assessments (professional diagnosis and treatment recommendations only) or mandatory treatment is available at your school
- Decide the best way to approach the member. If you plan to address her based on concern for her emotional/mental well-being, than typically a one-on-one or two-on-one conversation is best. This will help decrease potential defensiveness and will also help her know that you care. However, if you will be disciplining her due to her behavior, Theta policies state that discipline must be done in front of the entire member development committee. You can plan on using both approaches regarding one situation - private conversations regarding personal well-being and committee discussions regarding discipline.

### During the MDC meeting and/or in private conversation:

- Frame the conversation: "We're concerned and want to help you"
- Your goal: Get member help AND enforce policy/rules
- Ask the member for her input

## Suicide:

Suicide is one (common) symptom of depression

Every statement, joke, hint, reference, writing, drawing should be considered **real**.

Don't assume: "she doesn't mean it that way", "she would never do that" or "it's just a cry for help"

Educate yourself about how to intervene correctly.

Get trained - Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Training; Ask. Listen. Refer. Training (<http://www.asklistenrefer.org/msu>)

Consult with a PROFESSIONAL (not only an advisor or parent) about the specific situation

## Suicide Risk:

No thoughts about death/suicide

Passive thoughts about death

Active thoughts of suicide

Active thoughts of suicide & suicide plan

Active thoughts of suicide & suicide plan & intent to act

## Resources: Where to Go to Get Help

**911:** Call 911 if you think it is likely a person MAY act on their suicidal thoughts. (Better to call for help than regret not calling)

**Campus and local police:** List numbers for both your campus and local police throughout your facility if applicable or provide them to you members.

**Chapter advisor:** Your advisor is there to support you. Don't be afraid to use her as a resource as well.

**Health Center/Counseling Center:** Many campuses have educational programs for student organizations pertaining to stress, depression, anxiety and other behaviors related to mental health. You can also talk to them about encouraging members to attend counseling session if you have concerns about a member. You should NEVER diagnose someone with a problem, but you can encourage them to talk to someone about their problems. You can also call and get help with how to have that conversation.

**Talk One-to-One** is a national hotline with counselors that can provide support and guidance. Their number is 1-800-756-3124.

**Local counseling center or hospital:** There are a number of community practitioners available as well to provide you with support and guidance.