

In 15-Minute Focus: Depression: Signs and Strategies for Counselors, Educators, and Parents, Dr. Melisa Marsh provides a comprehensive look at depression and its effects on children and teenagers.

While depression is a common problem in our world today, it often goes unreported and untreated. And sadly, many youth believe they are alone in their pain. Children and teens may not know how to identify their troubling thoughts and emotions, so they need the adults around them to recognize their cries for help.

This book will equip counselors, educators, and family members with a detailed understanding of depression and offer tools for intervention so no student or peer goes unnoticed in their struggle.

In this book, you'll discover:

- Symptoms of depression
- Different types of depressive disorders
- How to identify depression versus sadness
- The connection between depression and other mental illnesses
- How school staff can support students with depression
- Successful management of depression

Each chapter includes a case study that illustrates an aspect of dealing with depression, along with questions to apply the book's principles in your own context. In addition, Dr. Marsh provides a comprehensive list of tools adults can use to support and improve the overall mental health of students, themselves, and peers.



Dr. Melisa Marsh currently serves as the Supervisor of School Counseling for the Cobb County school district in Marietta, GA., where

she coordinates the development and supervision of school counseling, student advisement, crisis response, and Hospital Homebound programs. She has 17 years of experience in filling the roles of Georgia State High School Counselor, Supervisor of Counseling, and School Counseling and Advisement Consultant. Melisa received her Ph.D. in Counseling Education and Personnel Services and her Specialist Degree in School Counseling from the University of Georgia. She received her Advanced Masters in School Counseling from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Melisa lives in the Atlanta Metro area with her husband and puppy. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, yoga, cycling, running, hiking, and spending as much time outdoors as possible.

Working alongside experts in various fields of mental health, the *15-Minute Focus* series is designed to home in on a specific mental health topic, signs to look for, practical intervention and classroom management strategies, and effective ways to communicate and collaborate with internal staff, outside referrals, and student families.



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Introduction

"My mental health problems are real and they are valid. I will not judge myself for the bad days when I can barely get out of bed. I will not make myself feel worse because someone else appears to be handling their mental illness better than I am handling mine. Recovery is not a competition."

—Matt Joseph Diaz

Have you ever experienced depression? Not just sadness, but real depression. The kind of feeling that swallows you whole, but in a way that is almost comforting. The numbness that keeps you from wanting to do anything but disconnect from everything and everyone in the world. The heaviness that feels like a weighted blanket that you just cannot remove. Have you ever had that feeling?

I will tell you honestly that I have. Not only am I an author and a counselor and someone who leads crisis response teams, but I'm also someone who has struggled with depression and anxiety throughout my adult life. Some days, getting out of bed is a struggle. I work hard to take care of myself mentally, physically, and spiritually so I can manage my mental health. It is a constant balancing act. Those friends and family members who know me well understand this balance. Over time, I have been able to share my journey with them and let them know when I need to disconnect and take care of myself and my mental health. However, those who know me only on a surface level would think I have it all together. They don't see the bad days, the self-loathing, the judgement, and the breakdowns.

Why am I sharing this with you as a reader? First and foremost, I believe in honesty. I believe that I have a duty to be transparent with you about who I am. However, I also share this to let you know that although my journey with depression continues every day, I have sought and found treatments that work. I take medication

and see an amazing counselor who help me to manage my mental health. I focus on self-care daily in order to offset the challenges of my job, stresses of our ever-changing world, and the curveballs of life. Although some people may struggle with depression throughout their lives, myself included, I believe it is a treatable illness. So, dear reader, as both the author and someone with depression, I am still hopeful. I am hopeful that more individuals will continue to seek treatment; I am hopeful that our culture will continue to remove the stigma of mental illness; I am hopeful that we will grow more knowledgeable about depression so that we can support students, staff, and communities in a greater capacity.



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What is Depression?

"Depression is being colorblind and constantly being told how colorful the world is."

— Atticus

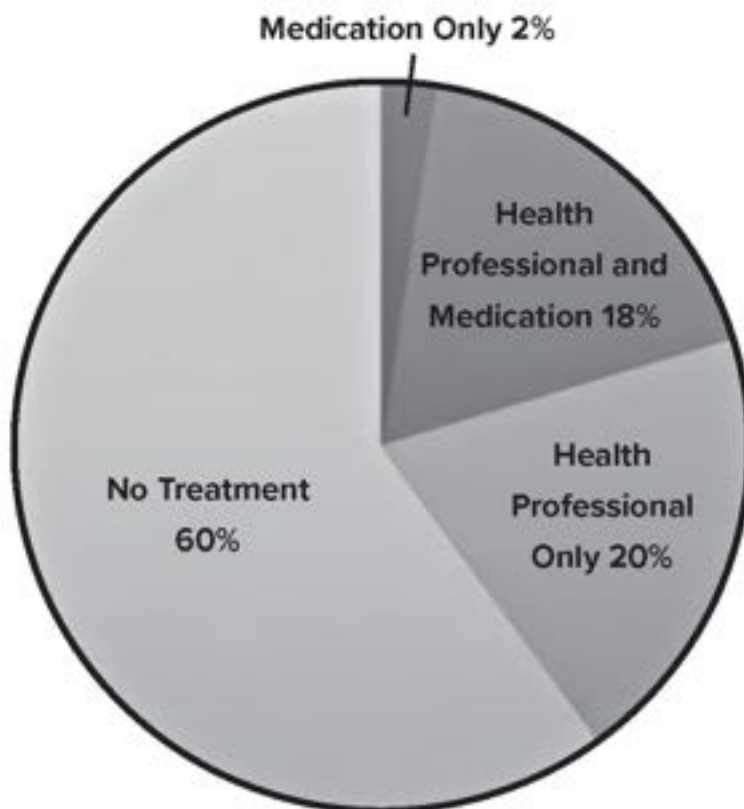
How many times have you heard a student, a parent, or another staff member say that they were depressed? Unfortunately, this term is used far too often, but many times it does not truly represent the clinical definition of depression. Instead, the individual may be feeling sad, anxious, or withdrawn for a short time. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), **depression**, which is otherwise known as **major depressive disorder or clinical depression**, is a common and serious mood disorder but lasts for a longer period of time than sadness. The American Psychiatric Association defines depression as a medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, how you think, and how you act.¹ Individuals who suffer from depression experience persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness and lose interest in activities they once enjoyed. In a school setting, we might see this when a student no longer engages in clubs, sports, or activities they once thrived in. Additionally, depression can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems that can decrease an individual's ability to function at home and/or school.

Depression must be diagnosed and not simply self-identified by an individual who believes they are exhibiting signs of depression.

- Regain a sense of satisfaction and control in your life and help ease depression symptoms, such as hopelessness and anger
- Learn to set realistic life goals
- Develop the ability to tolerate and accept distress using healthier behaviors

Depending on the severity of the depression, treatment can take a few weeks or much longer. Alternatives to face-to-face office sessions are available and may be an effective option for some people. Therapy can be provided through online sessions or phone calls if necessary.

Past Year Treatment Received Among Adolescents with Major Depressive Episode



(SAMHSA, 2017)