

## **Depression: A Serious Health Issue That Can't Be Ignored**

from the American Counseling Association

The recent suicide of actor/comedian Robin Williams has helped bring attention to a major health issue in this country. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, almost 7% of Americans had at least one major episode of depression during the past year. And, as was evidenced by Williams, anyone can be affected by depression and the results can be tragic.

But how do you differentiate between simply feeling sad at times and depression as a serious mental health issue? The reality, of course, is that we all have brief periods when we feel low and things aren't going quite right. The difference between such brief periods of sadness and true depression as a health issue is the severity of the symptoms and their longevity.

Depression is defined as when the symptoms a person is facing last for a period of two weeks or more. Such symptoms can take a variety of forms, but the most common are:

- changes in sleep or eating patterns
- strong feelings of sadness, guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness
- trouble concentrating or making decisions
- losing interest in or being able to enjoy activities you normally find fun
- general lack of energy for no real reason
- frequent negative thoughts of being no good, not being appreciated, or of not being able to do anything right
- thoughts of death or suicide.

Just because you, or someone close to you, has one or more of these symptoms, it doesn't mean that clinical depression is what is occurring. But if more than one of these or similar symptoms is experienced over a period of two or more weeks, it's a sign that there may be a problem which needs professional treatment.

The good news is that depression is a condition with clear symptoms that can be treated successfully. More importantly, it's not a condition that normally just "goes away." Instead, depression can worsen and become life-threatening.

It can be difficult for someone facing depression to make the decision to seek help. If you suspect that depression might be affecting your life, talk to a trained professional. It can be your minister, priest or rabbi, a professional counselor, or your family physician. They can help evaluate the problem and lead you to the variety of assistance that can help overcome depression and bring the return to a happier and more productive life.

*Counseling Corner*" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

###