



Depression isn't a weakness, it's a sign of strength

See depression through the eyes of an East student who has suffered through it himself

You rush to the bathroom almost running into the stall door. Your hands are shaking so it takes almost a full minute just to lock the door. Maybe if you take a few deep breaths the tears will stop. Yeah that should work. Fast forward 15 minutes. You've left the bathroom only to return not even five minutes later. This time it won't stop. Why can't you breath? This is a situation someone with depression often finds themselves in.

Help us examine a topic often avoided, depression. See through the eyes of one who has suffered through it himself, senior Dallas Knoop.

What does depression feel like from the mind of someone who has it?

"It feels like there's rocks tied to your feet. And you're trying to escape but it won't let you because it's just weighing you down. It's like a curtain of darkness. It's terrible. Everything is just kind of foggy. It's just....terrible," Knoop said.

What's your background with depression?

"I've been diagnosed with anxiety disorder and depression disorder. I have to see a therapist once a week. I'm currently on three different medications, that I take every day. I take Zolof for depression. Clamazapan, generic brand of Valium, for anxiety. I take that twice a day as needed. Because I'll get to where I'll work myself up into a panic attack and I've passed out before. I have those, if I feel I'm becoming anxious I take one. Also, because of the anxiety and depression I have really bad insomnia. I have a sleep aid I take that helps me sleep," Knoop said.

How does depression affect your life?

"When I first actually got diagnosed was this summer, about mid-June. I was at a movie with my little brother, we were watching 'The Terminator.' I just all of a sudden started to panic. I had blotches all over my body, I almost passed out. It passed and I didn't think anything of it. So I waited. The next morning, before I went to work, I started to panic again to the point where my dad took me to

the emergency room. They did x-rays of my heart and they said there was nothing wrong there. I was just sitting there in the emergency room, they had done all these tests, and then I had another panic attack. They said, 'We got it now' and so they sent me to other doctors. When this all first happened it completely immobilized me. I couldn't drive for a month or two because I was scared something would happen to me while I was driving. I didn't go to work for a month. Now, I've gotten some control over it. But there are days where in class I can't focus because I'm so depressed. Or there are days where I'll wake up in the morning and I won't go to school because you just feel like you legitimately can't get out of bed. I wake up and I just hope that I'm going to be better. Then I'm just not and it's a big slap in the face every morning. From all this, the depression and anxiety, I've developed a very uncommon symptom. It's called; depersonalization. It makes my life feel almost dream like. It's feels like I'm just watching myself. You lose your sense of what makes you, you. You start to think of all these crazy reasoning's to makes sense of it all. It feels like nothing's real. That's the hardest thing for me to go to," Knoop said.

What are some things you hear other people say about depression?

"I think some people don't understand that it's not just a mind-set. Some people are like 'Oh, its just because they think that. They just need to change their mind-set.' It's not, it's a chemical imbalance in the head that makes you think that way. So a lot of what I hear is people just don't know what it is. So they just assume that's

how it is. But it's not. There is so much more to it than that," Knoop said.

What is your definition of depression?

"People scoff it off like it's nothing but it's not. A mental disorder can really enable someone's life because it can be very overwhelming and hard to control at times. It makes you learn to hate yourself when you know that you don't. It can manipulate and trick you into thinking the worse possible things about yourself and others. It's like a bully you cannot get rid of. He is always there in the back of your head. Doubting you and telling you that you're not good enough or worth it. Telling you that you will never be as good as anyone else because you're you. You just have to learn to overcome it," Knoop said.

How often do you get asked "Are you okay?"

"Thankfully I have a large support group. Between my parents and my friends. They can tell when I'm feeling really down. So I get asked it quite frequently by them. But I've never been asked by a teacher or whatever. Because I tend to be able to put on a good show and hide everything," Knoop said.

Sad is the most common word associated with depression. What are some words you think should be associated with depression instead of sad?

"Alone. Very alone. Lack of will. Just, dark is almost a descriptor. Over-bearing. Powerful. It's so much more than just sad. There are so many other words," said Knoop.

How does it feel when someone who knows how to deal with depression tries to comfort you?

"That's the number one thing; I don't expect them to understand how I feel. I just want someone there. There is nothing better than when you're feeling down and you're just crying and someone, whether it's my mom, my girlfriend, or whoever just holding you while you cry. You don't need to understand what I'm going through, you don't need to try and act like you know how I feel. Just your presence is all that I need," Knoop said.

How does it feel when someone who doesn't know how to deal with depression tries to comfort you?

"It's different. I don't feel as open to certain people about that thing. I appreciate every person who has ever been there for me, whether close or not. But it's one of those things where I'm probably just better off with you not saying anything. It's kind of like when someone passes away and they say 'I'm so sorry for your loss. Is there anything I can do?' No there's nothing you can do. You can't bring them back. It's the same kind of question 'Are you okay?' The answer is no. The only thing that can truly help is time," Knoop said.

"If you're someone who doesn't know how to deal with depression per say something you could do is just talk to them. Not about it, don't bring it up, don't ask if they're okay, just talk. Anything, just keep the conversation going. Even if they're responding with one, two word answers, just keep talking. Keep their mind off things," Knoop said.

How do you feel about the phrase; "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?"

"I don't agree with that because

words can hurt. Words can really affect someone, for the good or bad. You don't know what anyone's going through just walking around at school. You see someone walking around in their pajamas and hairs messed up. You and your friends point and laugh but what you don't know is that her dad passed away that night. She has to now take care of her little brother. You really don't know what anyone is going through, so the simplest words can break someone. The mental scarring is way worse than any beating. I would rather be in physical pain than go through what I've been going through," Knoop said.

If you could describe depression in one word what would it be?

"Bully," Knoop said.

A note from the writer, Kyleana Whitmore;

I volunteered to do this article. This is not an assignment I researched and typed up just to get some points in the grade book. I have been diagnosed with clinical depression since around third grade. I know how isolated it can feel. However, you are not alone in this fight. If you take nothing else from this article, please just remember that simple yet very true sentence; you are not alone. No matter how bad it may seem there is always tomorrow. I know from experience. It's okay to not be okay. It's okay to cry. It's okay to go somewhere and scream until you lose your voice. It is not okay to give up. That has not, is not and will not ever be an option.

The point of view of a parent:

How has Dallas having depression affected your family?

"We just have to take each day as it comes now. There is no guarantee if it will be a good day, or bad. We've had to learn to identify and avoid stressful situations, that weren't problematic before. We've had to find a balance between empathy and expectations. We've gained a lot of patience and strength from it, more than we knew we had. It has given us a new perspective, understanding of mental illness, and forced us to improve our communication with each other," mother Heather Knoop said.

What is it like being the parent of a child with depression?

"Frightening, frustrating and overwhelming at times. Your parental instinct signals you to fix this, but you can't. You feel so helpless

seeing your child in mental anguish and there's nothing you can do but offer comfort and try to help them understand what's happening. Time seems to stand still while you're waiting on the doctor's treatment plan to work, but eventually you see some improvement, and you gain hope. It's a slow process and all you can really do is just love them through it," Knoop said.

What is something you think people should remember about depression?

Be kind always. The face of depression isn't always who you think it is. Many put on a mask and suffer in silence. It is nothing to be ashamed of, but the stigmas and bias that go with it are. Anxiety and depression are real. The brain can get sick just like any other organ in the body. It can be genetic and is common in young adults while the brain is still developing. It does not have to be debilitating or ruin your life! This is a treatable illness that can be managed if you have the desire to do so," Knoop said.



"You are not alone."

Q & A

With Erika Smith

How long have you been involved in therapy?

"I have been a mental health therapist for a year and a half," Smith said.

What Organization are you through?

"I work for Orchard Place Child Guidance Center. Child Guidance Center has center-based therapists providing therapy to children at their office downtown Des Moines and school-based therapists providing therapy to children in schools throughout the Des Moines metro area," Smith said.

On average how many kids do you see in a month?

"My caseload is typically close to 30-35 kids. I see most of those kids on a weekly basis," Smith said.

What is depression from a professional point of view?

"Depression is a mood disorder that can be a part of several different diagnoses. It can be situational where it comes and goes based on the circumstances going on in life. It can also be chronic where

it is sometimes caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. People with depression sometimes have trouble doing normal, day-to-day activities. Other symptoms include a lack of interest in normal activities, change in sleep patterns, appetite changes and feelings of worthlessness. Therapists use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to diagnose disorders. The DSM-5 includes many different criteria in diagnosing depression," Smith said.

What are some things kids can do to get help if they feel they have depression?

"It can be tough being a teenager and I believe that all teenagers could benefit from having a counselor or therapist to talk to! If kids were interested in receiving therapy, services the best place to start would be talking to their parents. Most agencies that provide therapy services require parents to sign papers if the child is under the age of 18. It's also great for kids to have a good support system in their friends. Just having someone to talk to about their feelings can be a great place to start. Some of the best natural things you can do on your own to improve your mood are exercise, eating healthy foods and getting enough sleep. If

the depression is more severe and is causing suicidal thoughts, it's always best to tell an adult who can get you the help you need. If it's too difficult to talk to your parents, you could always begin by speaking with someone you have a relationship with like a teacher or school counselor," Smith said.

What would you suggest someone do if they think someone they know has depression?

"I think it's always best to ask someone directly if there is something going on that they might be struggling with. It's also ok to ask a friend if they are experiencing any suicidal thoughts. Some teenagers having those thoughts aren't always sure where to begin getting help and could be waiting for someone to ask them directly. If a friend or someone you know ever says they are having suicidal thoughts it should always be taken seriously. It's important to talk to an adult who can get them the help they need (parents, teachers, school counselors or administrators). If your friend is just needing someone to talk to, the best thing you can do is just let them know you are there to support them and listen. Show them empathy," Smith said.

Signs and symptoms of depression in teens

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Irritability, anger, or hostility
- Tearfulness or frequent crying
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

If you or someone you know is struggling, encourage them to seek help from a professional. Suicide Prevention Line (1-800-273-8255) Suicide Hotline (1-800-784-2433) Teen Lifeline (1-800-248-8336) Text TEEN to 839863.