



Healthy Minds: **Discussion for Parents of Toddlers and Older Children**

(25 minutes)

1. Discussion: What is depression? (7-8 minutes)

Say: *“One mental health problem that affects many people is depression. Depression is a serious condition that affects the mind and the body and interferes with a person’s normal functioning. Without help, symptoms of depression can last for weeks, months, or even years.”*

Everyone feels sad every once in awhile. However, depression is a serious illness that has a great impact on the whole family.”

Ask: *“What do actresses Courteney Cox and Brooke Shields, President Abraham Lincoln, and comedian Drew Carey have in common?”*

Answer: They all had some form of depression.

Say: *“Depression is a common disorder and it can be treated. Depressive disorders affect about 9.5 percent of adult Americans each year, or about 19 million people.”*

There are different types of depression:

1. **Major depression** includes symptoms that interfere with a person’s everyday life, including work, sleep, eating, and other activities. This type is severe and may occur as one major depressive episode (not as common) or as several episodes in a lifetime (most common).
2. **Bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness)** consists of severe mood changes, cycling between extreme highs (mania) and lows (depression). Bipolar disorder can run in families and tends to start in late adolescence or early adulthood.”

Ask: *“How many of you know someone who has dealt with depression?”*

Say: *“If you think that you or someone you know might be dealing with depression, it is very important to seek help.”*

2. Discussion: Signs of depression (5-7 minutes).

Ask: *“What are some things that may indicate you or your partner has depression?”*

- Write participant responses on flip chart or dry erase board.

Sample responses:

- Fatigue (feeling extremely tired or exhausted)
- Depressed mood
- Inability to be happy in normally enjoyable activities
- Sleep difficulties that are not related to caring for your baby/child
- Inability to concentrate
- Overeating or no interest in eating
- Increased hostility and anger
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Disinterest in caring for the baby/child

Ask: *“If you ever started to feel like you may be depressed, what are some things you would do to take care of yourself?”*

Sample responses:

- Talk with your partner, a close family member or friend, or contact ParentLink’s WarmLine to share your feelings.
- Ask for help – have someone else do household chores and run errands while you rest.
- Exercise.
- Do something for yourself every day, even if it’s only for 15 minutes. Read a book, go for a walk, or take a bath to help yourself relax.
- Join a support group.
- Don’t be afraid to say “No” if someone asks for a favor.
- Talk to your doctor about your feelings.

Say: *“There is **no reason to be embarrassed** if you think you or your partner may have depression. Getting help only means you are **trying to help yourself, your children, your partner, and others with whom you are close**. It should never be considered a sign of weakness to seek professional help when you need it.”*

3. Discussion: Mothers and depression (5 minutes).

Say: *“Women are more likely than men to suffer from depression, perhaps because of biological and hormonal factors. According to*

the National Institute of Mental Health, hormones have been found to affect brain chemistry, which controls emotions and mood.

*One type of depression that can occur among **new mothers** is **post-partum depression**, affecting 10-20% of new mothers. New mothers may be surprised to find that after months of buying baby clothes and nursery furniture and looking forward to having their baby, they cannot stop crying and have little interest in being with their new baby. This kind of depression can occur any time through the first year after the baby's birth.*

The mother-child bond can be strained by maternal depression. Mothers' depression has also been linked to some problems for their children."

- Behavior problems
- Greater number of medical problems
- Lower school achievement
- Poorer social relationships
- Higher likelihood of adult depression, anxiety disorders, substance use

4. Discussion: Fathers and depression (5 minutes).

Say: *"Like mothers' depression, fathers' depression can have a negative effect on partner relationships and children's well-being."*

Ask: *"Men are typically less likely to seek help for depression than are women. Why do you think this might be the case?"*

Sample responses:

- Men may think it's not "manly" to show your feelings (threat to masculinity).
- Men may worry about the stigma attached to depression for their work and their relationships with family and friends.

Say: *"Many men are reluctant to seek help for depression, but it is just as important for men as women. You will be able to enjoy your family much more if you get the help you need."*

Refer back to the Healthy Minds lesson plan and the discussion, "Helping your partner with depression."