**Depression**

[***By Michael Luber, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist***](http://www.jfsmilw.org/about_jfs/bios/mhs/mluber.htm)

Depression affects over 20 million people in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control 3.4% of the U.S. population meet the criteria for major depressive disorder at any given time. Depression is often misunderstood. Everyone experiences it to some degree at some point in their lifetime. Many think depression is caused by a personality weakness and can be easily overcome by a change of attitude or thinking. However, the reality is that it is a serious illness caused by physical changes in the brain.

**An everyday bad mood, or?**

Most people question, “When does an everyday depression or bad mood cross over and become ‘clinical depression’ requiring professional attention?” The biggest determinant is whether or not depression affects one's normal daily life. When depression begins to interfere with your work, your home life, or relationships, it becomes more than a bad mood and it should be taken seriously. Depression takes away one's ability to enjoy life and function normally. Symptoms may include sadness, irritability, lack of concentration, changes in eating and sleep patterns, loss of interest in usual activities, crying spells, feelings of hopelessness, and thoughts of death or suicide.

**Treatment**

Treatment for clinical depression frequently includes psychotherapy and medication. There are a variety of antidepressant medications which help approximately 35% of those individuals diagnosed with a depressive disorder. Nutrition and exercise are also very important in helping to alleviate symptoms. Other alternative treatments include electroconvulsive therapy (ECT or shock treatment), acupuncture, meditation, hypnosis and herbal remedies.

In light of the current economic difficulties, teenage bullying, technology addictions, trauma, abuse and divorce, depression is becoming a greater concern. No one is immune from the impact of depression, as it cuts across culture, gender, race, age and disability.