



Coming

A very common emotional disorder, depression affects 19 million in the U.S. each year. Only 20% will get the help they need.

Written by Heather Lowrie

Can you imagine being 11 years old and having your life go up in flames, literally? Stephanie* not only lost all of her material possessions when her apartment caught fire, but she lost the heart of her mother. Although, her mom was still alive, the devastation of losing everything caused her to go into a deep depression. She provided just the basics for Stephanie like food, clothing, and a new shelter, even if it was a relative's home.

"My mother felt like she lost everything and I felt like she failed to realize that I lost everything, too," says Stephanie. Reflecting on her childhood helped her realize why

she took the destructive path that spiraled her into depression. Now, a mom herself, Stephanie has struggled to finally overcome depression and is enjoying her life.

The Face of Depression

According to the National Mental Health Association, clinical depression affects more than 19 million Americans. There are many contributing factors for depression, including biological, cognitive, and situational factors, gender, medications, and genetics. Women suffer from depression nearly twice as often as men. Depression also affects kids, with one out of every 33 children and one out of every eight teens

being diagnosed with clinical depression. How does depression feel? For Stephanie, she says it was exactly like the commercials describe it. "I was lonely, hopeless, and tired," she says. "It made me sick, selfish, sad, and desperate to try and fix it." Dr. Christell Lara of the Psychiatric Center of Katy notices that there are common "triggers" that can be seen in her patients. "In my teenage population, it is often the stress of school, scoring well on the SAT's, [and] getting into college," she says. In her post partum moms, it is often the transition of having a new baby and still trying to maintain a work, home, and family life balance. Financial strain has also been

Out of the Dark

another trigger in today's economy. Regardless of someone's background, accomplishments, accolades, or awards, there is not a single person that is immune from depression or the things in life that can trigger it. Although it is an illness that can affect anyone, it can be treated effectively.

Reaching out for Help

According to Stephanie, her most effective treatment was hitting rock bottom. "When I gave in and fully admitted how destructive I had been, everything changed," she says. Dr. Lara knows about the treatment for depression because she is a huge part of it. Aside from getting psychotherapy, depression can be treated with medication, yoga, meditation, and even art therapy. "It's hard to say what is actually the best, since people's needs and responses are so different," she says. That is why it is so important that people with the symptoms of depression reach out and get treatment quickly. No matter what treatment an individual chooses, early treatment is always best for those coping with depression.

Coming from the voice of experience, Stephanie wants people to understand that it is okay if someone is struggling

with depression and that they shouldn't be embarrassed. "Be honest about what you are feeling before you do something you regret and cannot take back," she says. "No one can help you if you don't let them know what you need." Family and friends can also rally around their loved ones and offer them unconditional love. "Often allowing and encouraging an open door of communication is the key, as patients will be more willing to talk about their depression and then ask for the help they might need," says Dr. Lara. There are also some wonderful local organizations such as the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and the National Alliance on Mental Illness that help educate family and friends about depression, allowing them to help others with their knowledge.

Beginning to Heal

Although Stephanie still struggles with depression, she strives to make a conscious decision every minute of the day to do the right thing. "It was easy for me to take the wrong path, but once the consequences finally caught up to me in a way that mattered, it was suddenly important and okay for me to challenge myself and take the high road instead of the easy one." At this

very moment, Stephanie is truly blessed to have found her passion in life, which she has turned into her career.

As a loving wife and mom, she knows what she has been through, is stronger because of it, and has the tools needed to get on with her life, one day at a time. Her words are precious as she says, "I think letting go of everything in my past allowed me to see what actually makes me happy. I am lucky enough to say that it is no longer just a hobby of mine, but my profession – a true career. Something I will never quit because it is a part of me. After everything I have done and things I have been through and put people through, my husband loves me still and I love him more than I ever have. My son loves me for me and I understand now how to love them back, unconditionally." **KM**

*"Stephanie" is a pseudonym for privacy reasons.

*HEATHER LOWRIE is a kindergarten teacher and mother of two. She is married to her high school sweetheart, James. She is a freelance writer and author of *The Inspired Wife* who enjoys the opportunity to encourage people through her writing.*

Experts say teen girls get depressed more than boys. About 1 in 8 teens will struggle with depression.



What's the Cause?

Although trauma, loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship, or any stressful situation may trigger a depressive episode, that's not always the case. Subsequent depressive episodes may occur with or without a trigger. Depression usually stems from a combination of genetic, biochemical, environmental, and psychological factors. Some types of depression tend to run in families, but depression can occur in people without any family history as well.

Signs of Depression

Seek professional help if you see a combination of these warning signs

- Changes in appetite
- Decreased energy and fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Excessive crying
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Feeling pessimistic or hopeless
- Irritability
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities
- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Problems sleeping
- Recurring aches and pains that don't respond to treatment
- Thoughts of death or suicide



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Depression Support Services

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Adolescent and parent support groups
Mondays 7 – 8:30 p.m.

Adult support group
Tuesdays 7 – 8:30 p.m.
St. Peter's United Methodist Church
dbsahouston.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness

– West Houston
Support group for family and friends of adults with mental illness
First and third Sunday from 4 – 5:30 p.m.
St. Peter's United Methodist Church
namiwesthouston.org

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