

## TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

### DEPRESSION

You are a person who stepped into the life of a child and has taken on a responsibility you probably did not expect to have. This enormous change that happened to you when you became a relative caregiver has most certainly put a tremendous stress on you as a person. This type of stress that many relative caregivers feel is often a factor in a person's depression. It is very important to be aware of your mental health and to take care of your mental health so that you can provide the best care for the children.

#### So what is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects your body, mood and thoughts. It can have a negative impact on your eating habits, sleeping patterns, self-esteem and physical well-being. Depression doesn't just go away and should not be confused with having the blues. If left untreated, depression can last for weeks, months or years. <sup>1</sup>

Approximately 19 million people have depression and the vast majority of people go untreated. As a result of going untreated, depression sometimes shows up as a destructive lifestyle. For instance some people drink to excess, over-eat, use drugs and unfortunately sometimes end their life by suicide.

The symptoms for depression are different for everyone. When looking at typical symptoms of depression it is important to realize that you might have a few of the symptoms or most all of the symptoms. Everyone is different so depression shows up differently for everyone.

#### Some typical symptoms of depression are: <sup>1</sup>

- Increased or decreased appetite
- Over sleeping or experiencing insomnia
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, helplessness, and worthlessness
- The loss of experiencing pleasure
- Day to day activities are harder and harder to complete
- Emotional change: crying more often, becoming more aggressive and/or more agitated
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety
- Irritability and short temper

If you feel like you are experiencing some or all of these symptoms the most important thing to do is to seek help. Try talking with your family physician. They will be able to give you advice, prescribe you medicine or refer you to a psychiatrist. It has also been suggested by research that the symptoms of depression can be lessened by lifestyle changes. Examples of good lifestyle changes may include getting outside more, exercising, meditating, and reducing your alcohol intake.

It is important not to isolate yourself. It has been shown through numerous studies that relative caregivers who have a stable support system and who are able to talk about their feelings are happier and less depressed. If you have the time and the ability to get to a support group meeting it might be the activity that makes all the difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Conway, Annie & Bailey, Sandra. "Depression: What you should know." Montana State University Extension. Oct. 2005. [www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt200507.pdf](http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt200507.pdf)

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