

## ***Coping with College Series***

### **Men, Depression & Getting Help**

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There is a growing awareness in the media that depression is a common experience. While the number of people affected by depression cannot be determined exactly, we do know that tens of millions suffer from this disorder and that only a small proportion of those afflicted actually receive appropriate treatment. This continues to be true, despite the fact that there are very effective medical and psychological treatments for depression. Perhaps an even more interesting fact is that women seek treatment for depression far more often than men, even though men are also affected in significant numbers. Given that there are effective treatments for depression, why is it that men are less likely to seek help?

Recognizing this problem, the National Institute of Mental Health has recently begun a media campaign entitled “Real Men - Real Depression” [<http://menanddepression.nimh.nih.gov/default.asp>]. Their goal is to change the way men think about themselves, about depression and about seeking help.

Apparently one of the biggest hurdles for men is that they don't view seeking help as “manly.” Whether its men's reluctance to ask for directions or to seek medical attention, it seems deeply ingrained in men to “go-it-alone” or to ignore physical or emotional problems. So it is no surprise to learn that men are far more likely to deny or hide their depressive symptoms. Rather, men are far more likely to use/abuse alcohol or other substances, to act out aggressively, to engage in high-risk behaviors, to suffer or die in accidents and/or to commit suicide. Not surprisingly, this all leads to the sad fact that men tend not to live as long as women.

It is likely that depression manifests itself somewhat differently in men, perhaps because of the pressure in men's lives to ignore or dismiss the usual signs of depression. Rather than focusing on symptoms such as unhappiness or tearfulness, for men the focus should be on the triggers of depression, for example the loss of a significant relationship or of a job. For men, the reactions to that loss indicating depression could include: increased irritability or anger, isolation, loss of interest in life, increased use of alcohol, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and/or sleep disturbance.

We all have a role to play in recognizing these signs of depression in others and in actively encouraging the men around us to seek help when they are distressed. All too often men only seek help because of the active

involvement of someone in their lives who cares for them and urges them to seek help.

If you or someone you know may be depressed, please come to the Student Counseling Services or call [438-3655] to set up a confidential, consultation. The most difficult step for men appears to be the very first one – to acknowledge there is something wrong they can't fix on their own or just endure until it goes away. Once the decision is made to get help, the problem is well on its way to being resolved.