

Signs and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Written & Provided by



All of us are subject to the stresses of daily life and personal relationships. Different people react differently. As educators, you stand with your students – both in times of celebration and in times of emotional need – and your help is valuable. So is your ability to tell when an individual has reached a level of anxiety or depression that calls for clinical counseling or medical help. This booklet is designed to help you learn what to look for and what to say to a student you're concerned about.



Care for yourself

so you can care for others.

First things first. In your vocation, it's easy to give so much to others that you deplete your own resources. Don't let that happen. Remember that you're human and deserve the same love and care you give your family and students. So take care of your own body, mind, and spirit. Meanwhile, follow these suggestions to protect your own mental health.

- **Don't take situations so personally** – it's hard, but try.
- **Stay aware of your emotions** – they can teach and motivate you, so don't dismiss them!
- **Take time to be creative** – write, sing, paint, do puzzles, send your soul a message that it's valuable.
- **Get adequate rest** – you need it.
- **Count your blessings** – keep a gratitude journal.
- **Don't try to please everyone** – it can't be done.
- **Practice saying “no” to requests** – listen to your internal voice.

What to know about anxiety.

Be alert for students whose anxiety level seems out of proportion to the daily stress they encounter.

How to recognize signs of anxiety.

Common symptoms and signs of anxiety disorders include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness.
- Problems falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Heart palpitations and/or shortness of breath.
- Restlessness, inability to be still and calm.
- Nausea.
- Muscle tension.
- Feelings of foreboding or dread.

Some anxiety disorders involve panic attacks.

Symptoms include:

- “Racing” heart and/or chest pains, as if there is a tight band around one’s chest.
- Sense of terror or sense that one might die or have a heart attack.
- Difficulty breathing.
- “Tunnel Vision.”
- Feeling dizzy, faint or weak.
- Sweating or having the chills.
- Feeling out of control or a loss of control.

How to talk to students about anxiety.

Anxiety disorders can disrupt your student's relationships and ability to work or participate in daily activities. So offer encouraging words:

1. **“Talk to an expert.”** Foster relationships with mental health workers, and keep a list of trusted counselors and psychiatrists to recommend to parents of students who might need treatment.
2. **“Try calming techniques.”** Teach your students calming techniques, breathing exercises or other ways of centering during anxiety.
3. **Learn more about what may be causing your student's anxiety, including triggers like bullying and stress.**

What to know about depression.

Learn to differentiate between students simply struggling with stress and those who may be experiencing depression.

How to recognize signs of depression.

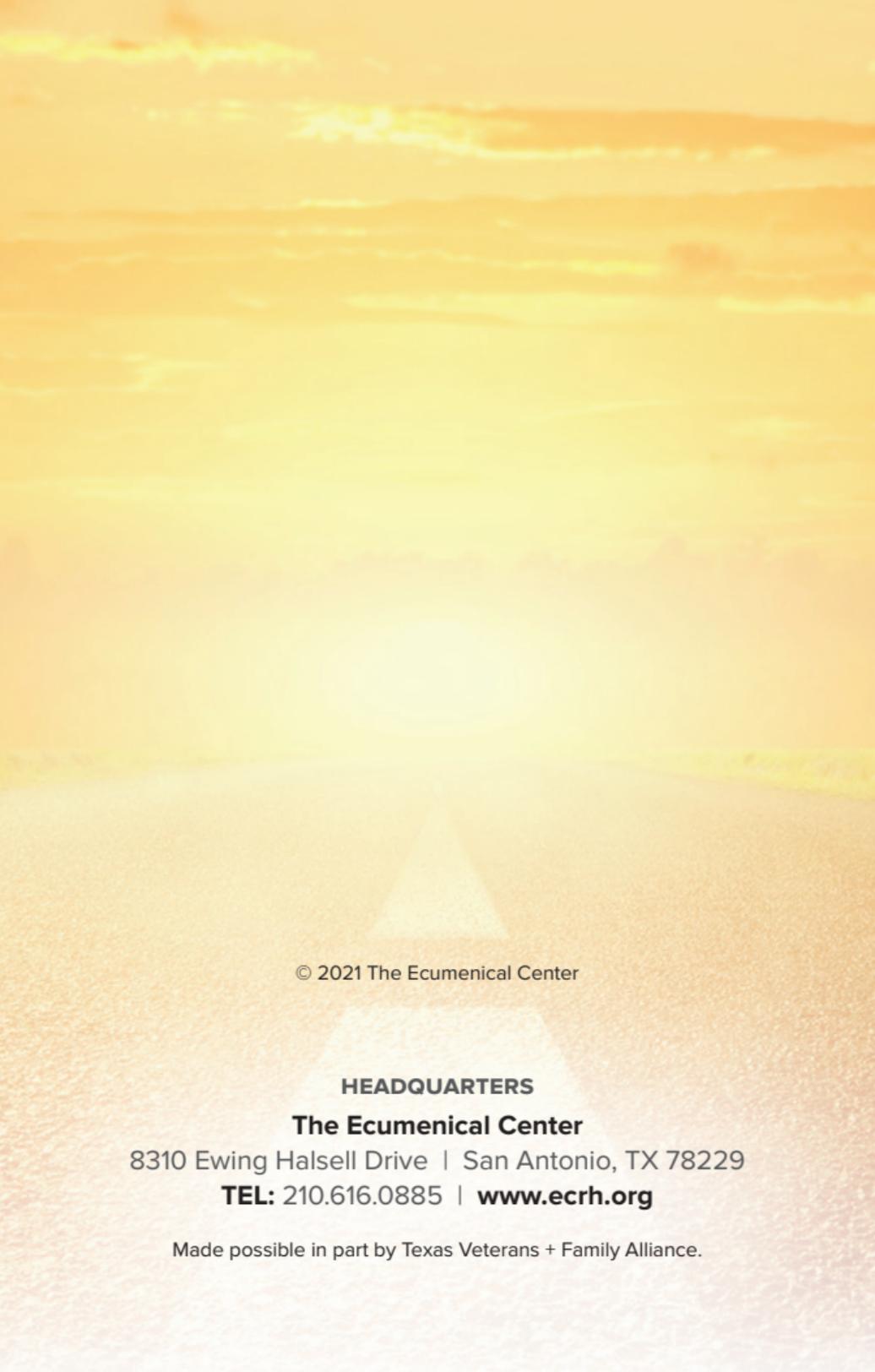
Common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or empty most of the time. In children and adolescents, this could also include irritability.
- Lack of interest or pleasure in most activities of the day.
- Changes in weight and appetite – either increased appetite and weight gain or decreased appetite and weight loss.
- Changes in sleep – insomnia or sleeping more than usual and feeling fatigued.
- Feeling restless, or worthless, or excessively guilty nearly every day.
- Recurrent thoughts of death (e.g., “I think my family would be better off if I were just gone”), thinking about suicide without having a plan, attempting suicide or having a specific plan for committing suicide.
- Loss of energy and/or motivation.
- Interpersonal withdrawal.
- Decreased or a total lack of concentration.

How to talk to students about depression.

Here are some suggestions for what to say and do when working with students who are experiencing symptoms of depression:

- 1. “Let me ask you some questions.”** Use the symptoms of depression noted here to assess levels of distress.
- 2. “Do you think a counselor might help?”** Ask the person’s opinion and feelings before you recommend speaking to a counselor.
- 3. Give some information to the parents.** Even if the student is initially reluctant to seek treatment, you can still provide facts about depression (including names and numbers of counselors you know and trust) to the parents.
- 4. “Let me help,” or “Let me send you to someone.”** Know your competence and limitations when interacting with students who may have a serious mental disorder, such as depression.
- 5. Encourage good health habits.** Talk about eating healthy and sleeping enough at night. Consider that alcohol, tobacco and/or drug use may be a factor.
- 6. Don’t downplay the problem.** Do not minimize emotional distress and psychological disorders for your students.
- 7. Trust therapy to work.** Know – and mention to the parents – that 80% of individuals who seek therapy for personal problems or psychological disorders report improvement and find psychotherapy to be very helpful.



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