



# Depression and Suicide Prevention among Asian-American Students

## What Is Depression?

Depression is a condition that affects people of all ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations. Contrary to what many believe, a person with depression cannot “get over it” or “snap out of it” any more than someone with a medical problem can get over an illness. Depression can be passed from one generation to the next; sometimes stress or other life events trigger depression, or depression results from a combination of factors. When someone is depressed he or she typically feels sadness that lasts longer than a few days or weeks and this can be accompanied by thoughts of wanting to hurt or kill oneself. Fortunately, depression can be treated. This flyer is intended to provide education to help you better understand depression and know how and when to seek help when you or someone you know is experiencing depression.

## What Does Depression Look Like?

Recognizing depression is a critical first step in getting yourself or a friend the help needed. It is important to keep in mind that friends or loved ones may not know how to ask for help, so understanding what to look for is important.

## Common concerns among Asian-American college students who experience depression:

- Academic problems: Missing classes, not completing assignments, inattentiveness, and/or failing exams and courses
- Relationship problems: Conflicts with parents, roommates, friends, or partners, feelings of social isolation
- Engaging in risky behaviors: Violence, unprotected sexual practices, alcohol and other drug abuse, and/or driving under the influence
- Physical symptoms: Muscular tension, insomnia, stomachaches, among others

## Suicide rates of Asian-American college-age students are among the highest of their peers

This fact underlines the need for suicide awareness, outreach, and prevention efforts within the Asian-American community. Often, Asian-American college students feel ashamed if they are experiencing emotional or interpersonal problems. Consequently, they may feel embarrassed about seeking mental health services. For Asian-American students, the absence of interpersonal attachments, feelings of worthlessness, and a sense of hopelessness have been correlated with thoughts of suicide.

## Risk Factors for Suicide within the Asian-American Community:

- Academic concerns
- Conflicts with parents or being rejected by them
- Feelings of alienation, loneliness, guilt, shame, or inadequacy
- A history of physical or sexual abuse
- A family history of depression and/or suicide
- Easy access to firearms or other lethal methods
- Impulsive or aggressive inclinations
- Financial concerns
- Conflicts with friends, roommates, or peers
- Having made a previous suicide attempt or has had previous thoughts of killing oneself

**Traditional Asian values may  
conflict with other cultures**

- Experiencing a recent loss (e.g., death or break-up)
- Unwillingness to seek help because of shame in seeking mental health services
- A coping style in which problems are kept inside, unexpressed

## Know the Warning Signs

Although individuals may vary in how they respond to suicidal thoughts, there are common warning signs that may suggest an individual is considering suicide. An individual may be at risk for suicide if he or she:

- Reports feeling very depressed
- Talks about wanting to commit suicide
- Experiences anxiety and/or stress
- Is focused on death and dying
- Writes poems, letters, or stories about death and/or suicide
- Starts giving away possessions
- Withdraws from friends and activities he or she once enjoyed
- Experiences feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Prepares for death by making out a will
- Says things like, "I don't deserve to be here," "I wish I were dead"
- Increases their use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Engages in reckless behaviors
- Has physical symptoms

**It's important to notice and follow up when someone you know is acting out of character**

## You Can Help

First and foremost, take suicide seriously. It is always better to over-react than under-react. Additionally, here are some other things you can do when someone you know is thinking about suicide:

- Seek support from others. Do not allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy
- Listen and accept the other person's feelings. Try not to judge or argue
- Be direct and listen. Don't act shocked by their plans
- Never dare someone to kill themselves
- If possible, never leave the person alone

**Offer to go with the person to seek help from a parent, a counselor, or other source of support**

## Find Someone Else Who Can Help

- The Counseling Center
- Resident Advisers
- Campus Security
- Family or friends
- A religious or spiritual counselor