

Words Can Work offers information, communication strategies and the words to help keep kids safe.

If you're worried that someone's considering suicide, ask him or her directly.

You can say, "Are you depressed?" "How bad does it get? Do you ever feel like life isn't worth living?" "Have you thought about hurting yourself?"

Dr. Rauch

Encourage young people to tell an adult if a friend is struggling emotionally.

You can say, "If one of your friends seems to be having a hard time emotionally, or if they mention killing themselves, please tell me or another adult. You might think, at the time, that this is betraying your friend, but it isn't. By confiding in someone who can intervene – a teacher, counselor or me – you could save a life." **Dr. Rauch**

Someone experiencing depression may be particularly vulnerable to substance abuse.

Parents can say, "Someone who's depressed may get drunk or high and associate feeling better with using that substance. They may tend to use it again and again to experience the same relief. This can lead to dependence and addiction, which can set the stage for even worse problems." **Dr. Ball**

Read more communication strategies in this *Words Can Work* booklet.



WORDS CAN WORK®
When Talking About Drugs
Published by Blake Works Inc.
PO Box 1402
Gloucester, MA 01930 U.S.A.
978.282.1663
info@wordscanwork.com
wordscanwork.com

Words Can Work: When Talking About Depression



A guide for young people, parents, and other caregivers



About Us

WORDS CAN WORK® **When Talking About Depression**

Published by Blake Works Inc.
PO Box 1402 Gloucester
Massachusetts 01930 U.S.A.

Copyright © 2010 Blake Works Inc.
All rights reserved.

Blake Works Inc. is an authorized
licensee of the trademark Words
Can Work® owned by Jeanne
Blake.

ISBN-10: 0-9753147-4-2

ISBN-13: 978-0-9753147-4-6

Printed in the United States of
America

No portion of this publication may
be reproduced, stored in or intro-
duced into a retrieval system or
transmitted, in any form, or by any
means (photocopying, electronic,
mechanical, recording or other-
wise), without the express prior
written permission of Blake Works
Inc. and Jeanne Blake.

The scanning, uploading and distri-
bution of this booklet on the Inter-
net or by any other means without
the express permission of Blake
Works Inc. and Jeanne Blake is il-
legal and punishable by law.

The content of this booklet is for
informational purposes only. It is
not intended to replace profes-
sional advice. For specific issues,
please consult a medical or health
professional.

Use of some photos courtesy of
Chamique Holdscrow, Beckett
Media LP WNBA Enterprises LLC,
Ronnie Haas.



Author Jeanne Blake is a medical
reporter and the creator of *Words Can
Work*®. She is also founder and president
of Blake Works Inc. (certified as a
Woman Owned Business) and Family
Health Productions, which produce mul-
timedia about the public and mental health challenges
young people face growing up.

Blake is an affiliated faculty member of the Division on
Addictions at Harvard Medical School, and a trustee of
McLean Hospital, Harvard's largest psychiatric facility.
She has earned the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Jour-
nalism Award and has appeared on *Oprah*, *The Today
Show*, *The Cristina Show*, and CNN, and has been
featured on NPR and Bloomberg Radio.

Jeanne Blake speaks nationally to parents, healthcare
professionals, educators, and work/life professionals
about how adults can help kids make healthy decisions.
She is a consultant to communities and corporations on
how to implement programs to support effective
parent/child communication.

wordscanwork.com

At wordscanwork.com, you can learn about other *Words Can
Work* booklets and DVDs that help young people face chal-
lenges growing up. You can read *Issues and Answers* columns
in which young people, parents, and experts share their experi-
ence dealing with substance abuse, bullying, depression, and
more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog.

Contents

Note From the Author	2
One Suicide's Survivors	3
Warning Signs of Suicide and Corresponding Actions	9
Knowing Your Child	10
Grandma June's Champ	11
Seeing the Symptoms.....	15
Depression Warning Signs in Adolescents and Young Adults	19
My Brother's Keeper	20
Talking Through Life	23
Self-Injury	27
Opening up to Wellness	28
Additional Resources	32
Special Thanks	Inside Back Cover
Contributors.....	Inside Back Cover
Endnotes	Inside Back Cover

Words Can Work

When Talking About Depression



Note From the Author

For years, parents and professionals have asked us to make depression a topic of our educational materials. I hesitated for a long time. Like most families, mine has been touched by mental illness. I wondered whether working on the project would strike too close to home.

My mother suffered from bipolar disorder. When she was depressed, even close relatives told her to just “snap out of it.” But you can’t “snap out of” depression, no matter how much you want to. The symptoms of depression are a result of a change in the neurochemistry of the brain.

What does help those who suffer with mental illness is professional intervention, understanding, support, and acceptance.

After a lot of thought, I felt that we had to write this *Words Can Work* booklet and produce the DVD *Depression: True Stories*. In each one, insightful and courageous young adults, and their friends and families, tell their stories. Leading mental health professionals – Joanna Ball, Ph.D., Jefferson Prince, M.D., Paula Rauch, M.D., and Janet Wozniak, M.D. – generously share their expertise.

We hope that through our efforts, the stigma often associated with mental illness will be lessened; the signs of depression and other mental health disorders will be recognized earlier; people will get the treatment they need; and lives will be transformed and saved.

One Suicide's Survivors

As an Army family, General Mark Graham, his wife Carol, and their three children, Jeffrey, Kevin, and Melanie, moved every few years.

“We were really close,” Melanie says of her family. “We’d play cards and watch basketball games together.”

Melanie had a special connection with her brother Kevin. “He was always very protective of me,” she says.

Melanie’s bond with her brothers stuck. They all attended the University of Kentucky and shared an apartment.

Jeff and Kevin were on full ROTC scholarships. Everyone expected Kevin to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, Daddy Doc, a warm and compassionate family physician.

Melanie and Kevin spent so much time together that Melanie’s sorority sisters thought Kevin was her best friend, not her brother.

Kevin was considered the family’s perfect child – straight A’s, an accomplished athlete, and never causing trouble.

In Kevin’s junior year, Melanie noticed that he’d grown uncharacteristically sad.

General and Carol Graham, stationed in Korea, noticed too. “His grades started to slip,” Carol says. “He said college wasn’t what he thought it would be.”

Kevin had filled out a questionnaire that indicated depression. A psychiatric nurse recommended he take antidepressant medication.

FACT:

People who die by suicide are frequently suffering from undiagnosed, undertreated, or untreated depression.¹

“Did you know depression is an illness and not just a feeling?”

Kevin



any longer. You think: If I'm going to feel this way, I can't go on. That's when people think of suicide. Mike shows us that, with treatment, you can change your mindset and feel hopeful and happy again.

Jeanne Blake: Mike and his parents talk often now about *how* he's feeling, and about suicide. They've learned how to talk about it.

Dr. Prince: That's important. Talking about suicide doesn't make it more likely to happen; it makes it less likely. There's no single right way to talk about it. But with the help of a professional, you can learn the best approach for your family. (*For suggestions on how to talk with a young person about suicide, see page 7*)

"I'm so glad that I did ask for help, because my life is so much better."

Mike

Ronnie's words to parents

"We had no idea how much denial we were in about Michael's illness. As long as I was in denial, maybe he wasn't depressed. That's almost what it felt like. I wish we'd gotten him help sooner."

Chris's words to parents

"I've learned to respond openly to my fears and disappointments and demonstrate how to work through these emotions. It helps me get feedback from those around me, and allows Michael to see me work through rough patches in my own life."

Mike's words to parents

"When someone tries to describe what depression feels like, you have to multiply it tenfold, because the sheer weight that they feel, and the pain and fear they're experiencing, simply can't be described."

Remember

If you have suicidal thoughts, help is available through your doctor, friends, or family. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

**See Mike's story in the DVD
Depression: True Stories available at wordscanwork.com**

Depression Warning Signs in Adolescents and Young Adults*

Knowing the warning signs can help you distinguish depression from occasional normal sadness or moodiness. Common symptoms of depression include:

- Sad or irritable mood
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Significant changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping; oversleeping
- Slow or agitated movement
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide

Most adolescents and young adults experience the above symptoms occasionally. But, if you observe a number of these symptoms for more than a few weeks, seek professional help. Adolescents and young adults often show depression in other ways as well:

- Frequent headaches, stomach aches or tiredness, without a medical cause
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Being bored; sulking
- Lack of interest in spending time with friends or family
- Abuse of alcohol or other substances
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Fear of death
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger, hostility, or crying
- Reckless behavior
- Neglect of clothes and appearance
- Difficulty with relationships
- Changes in mood

* *Note: These criteria may also apply to pre-teens*

Source: Adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Additional Resources

Recommended Resource

Depression: True Stories (26-minute DVD)

Three young adults, including professional basketball player Chamique Holdsclaw, describe living with depression, suicidal thoughts, and the stigma that often surrounds mental illness. They tell how early diagnosis and treatment can transform and save lives. Includes discussion guide. For grades 6 through college, parents, and other caregivers.

“Depression: True Stories provides compelling first person accounts of the suffering associated with this life threatening illness – depression. At the same time, it inspires hope about the power of treatment. It’s certain to educate adolescents, young adults, parents, other caregivers, and health care professionals about a serious illness that can and should be treated.”

Paula K. Rauch, M.D.
Chief, Child Psychiatry Consultation Liaison Service
Director, Marjorie E. Korff, PACT (Parenting At a Challenging Time) Program
Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School

Also available at wordscanwork.com

Words Can Work® Booklets

Words Can Work:
When Talking About Alcohol

Words Can Work:
When Talking About Bullying

Words Can Work:
When Talking About
Depression

Words Can Work:
When Talking About Drugs

Words Can Work:
When Talking With Kids
About Sexual Health

Words Can Work:
When Talking About Steroids

DVDs

Alcohol: True Stories Hosted
by Matt Damon

Boys on Bullying

Depression: True Stories

Drugs: True Stories

In Our Own Words:
Teens and AIDS

The Power of Girls:
Inside and Out

Raising Healthy Kids:
Families Talk About Sexual
Health

Steroids: True Stories Hosted
by Curt Schilling

**Quantity discounts available.
Call for pricing.
Telephone: 978.282.1663**

**Order at:
wordscanwork.com**

**E-mail:
info@wordscanwork.com**

Contributors



Joanna Ball, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and Director of Child and Adolescent Externship Training at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine.



Jefferson Prince, M.D. is the Director of Child Psychiatry at North Shore Medical Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, and an Instructor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.



Paula K. Rauch, M.D. is Chief of the Child Psychiatry Consultation Liaison Service, Director of the Marjorie E. Korff, PACT (Parenting At a Challenging Time) Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, and an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.



Janet Wozniak, M.D. is Director of the Pediatric Bipolar Disorder Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, and an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

wordscanwork.com

At wordscanwork.com, learn about other *Words Can Work* booklets and DVDs that tell true stories about challenges kids face growing up. You can read *Issues and Answers* columns in which young people, parents, and experts share their experience dealing with substance abuse, bullying, depression, and more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog.



Endnotes

1. Suicide – Some Answers, National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, A Collaborative Effort of SAMHSA, CDC, NIH, HRSA, HHS
2. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2007) Best Practices Registry for Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet: Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention. Newton, MA. http://www.sprc.org/featured_resources/bpr/PDF/AASWarningSigns_factsheet.pdf. Accessed December 1, 2009
3. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
4. NIMH, NIH Publication No. 00-3561, Depression
5. NIMH, NIH Publication No. 00-4778, Child and Adolescent Bipolar Disorder: An Update from the National Institute of Mental Health

Special Thanks

Beckett Media LP

Richard Falzone, M.D.
McLean Hospital

Madelyn S. Gould, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Columbia University/New York State Psychiatric Institute

George B. Handran

Los Angeles Sparks

Shana Martin
Williams & Connolly LLP

Robert McKeown, Ph.D.
University of South Carolina

Jane L. Pearson, Ph.D.
National Institute of Mental Health

Bonnie Thurston
NBA

WNBA Enterprises, LLC

Linda Zamvil, M.D.
Assistant Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital, McLean Hospital

The Spanish translation of *Words Can Work: When Talking About Depression* is provided by **Precision Translating Services Inc.**
www.pretran.com

Design:
Brian Murphy / Art & Design, Inc.
www.artanddesign.com