



Depression: Youth, Counselling and Antidepressants

The advent of modern antidepressant medication has been a lifesaver to many. Recent research demonstrates that a combination of counselling and medication can provide the most effective treatment for youth suffering from depression. However, there is evidence to suggest that in the early stages of medication treatment, there is an elevated risk of suicidal thought, which for some persons may lead to suicidal behaviour. This is causing a great many people to reconsider their use of medication, even when indicated.

This issue is determining which youth will benefit from one or the other or both treatments. To this end a good assessment will look for *exogenous* factors and *endogenous* factors.

Exogenous factors are those things outside of the individual that may contribute to depression. These include; family dysfunction, abuse or neglect, parental separation, school related problems and relationship problems. If it can be determined that one or more of these kinds of factors are at play, then counselling alone may be sufficient to treat depression. Such counselling includes family therapy, or in the case of separated and fighting parents, mediation to help them resolve their conflict, so that the youth is no longer subject to their turmoil. If the youth is in a difficult interpersonal relationship, then counselling for the youth to address the difficulty may be in order. If the youth is abused or neglected, these issues must be addressed and the youth's safety must be attained.

Endogenous factors generally relate to biological or neurobiochemical factors. If there is a history of depression in the family and there are no known exogenous factors, then medication alone may be the treatment of choice. Often though, with endogenous depression, the sufferer has difficulty controlling depressive thoughts and as such, in this situation a very specific form of counselling, CBT or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, is also indicated.

There are times of course when both endogenous and exogenous factors are at play. In these circumstances a combination of counselling and medication could be in order and should seriously be considered.

Parents and youth are cautioned against making their decision solely on the basis of newspaper articles proclaiming the good or the bad about any treatment. Depression is a serious disorder, which left untreated can lead to suicidal thoughts, action, injury and death. If you or your child is depressed, obtain a good assessment by qualified professionals that will look at both endogenous and exogenous factors and devise a treatment plan accordingly. Further, the counsellor and the prescribing physician should be working hand-in-glove following the individual to manage safety issues and communicating regularly about progress.

It is important to know that with antidepressant medication, it can take a good thirty days before the therapeutic effect is achieved. During this time, counselling may be of benefit to resolve other issues as listed above or to simply provide support until the medication reaches effectiveness.

If you or your child is depressed, get help. It is often advisable to start with your family doctor or community clinic. A physician can make the diagnosis and direct you to treatment.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.