

Major Depression

*Adapted from Major Depression Fact Sheet:
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)*



A bridge for law enforcement
and community collaboration

What is it?

Unlike normal emotional experiences of sadness, loss or passing moods, major depression can significantly interfere with a person's thoughts, behavior, mood, activity and physical health.

- A serious medical illness; a brain disorder that can be brought on by physical, psychological and biological factors
- Affects 9.9 million American adults (5% of adult population per year)
- Leading cause of disability in the U.S. and many other developed countries
- Can occur at any age
- Affects all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups
- If untreated, episodes can last from six months to a year or more
- Left untreated, depression can lead to suicide

POLICE INTERVENTION WILL MOST LIKELY COME AS A RESULT OF A "SUICIDE IN PROGRESS" OR A PSYCHOTIC EPISODE.

Symptoms:

The onset of the first episode of major depression may not be obvious if it is gradual or mild. The following symptoms of major depression represent a significant change from how a person functioned before the illness.

- Profoundly sad or irritable mood
- Pronounced changes in sleep, appetite and energy
- Lack of interest in or pleasure from activities that were once enjoyed
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness and emptiness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain.

THE FOLLOWING MAY LIMIT THE PERSON'S ABILITY TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO POLICE COMMANDS

- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, and remembering
- Physical slowing or agitation
- In extreme cases, the person may lose touch with reality and become psychotic.

Self-medication: Persons with severe depression may often self-medicate with alcohol or illicit drugs in an attempt to improve their mood. Substance abuse will worsen the above symptoms and make a person more prone to suicide.

Always use caution. If possible, try to get as much information about the person before intervening. Be on guard for an attempt at "suicide by cop."