

UnScripted Youth Guide

Understanding Emotions, Mental Health and Medication

Overview

- This resource serves as an all-encompassing guide to mental health treatment
- Our goal is not to tell you what to do, but instead provide the information needed to make the right decision for your circumstance
- This guide is educational only and not a substitute for medical advice

Letter to the Reader

Why You Are Here

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you or someone you care about has been struggling with their mental health. This could mean you've felt sad, anxious, stressed, numb or even just unsure of who you are. Maybe you've been offered medication to help ease your suffering and you are wondering what that entails. Maybe you are already on medication and want to learn about alternative options.

This guide isn't here to force you down a certain path. It's here to help you slow things down.

Feeling negative emotions doesn't mean that there is something wrong with you. You are not broken. In fact, emotions are central aspect of what makes us human. Strong emotions doesn't automatically mean you have a mental illness.

Medication is not the only option, nor is it the first line of defense. For some people, psychiatric medication can be helpful. For others, it can come with trade-offs that aren't always explained clearly. Decisions about mental health deserve time, information, and honest conversations.

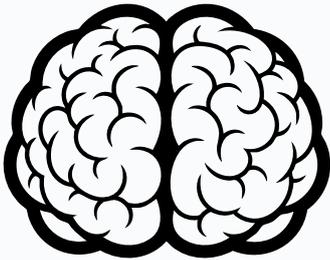
This guide exists to help you understand your options before making choices that can affect how you feel, think, and experience the world.

Why Emotions Feel So Intense as a Teen

During teen years, emotions can feel especially intense. The brain is still developing, including areas that control emotion and decision-making. Social pressure is high and there is uncertainty about the future.

Strong emotions are often a central aspect of adolescence, not an inherent malfunction.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS GUIDE



Understand emotion vs illness



Learn how antidepressants are prescribed



Recognize benefits and drawbacks



Ask better questions



Explore alternatives



Decide with confidence

Understanding Distress vs Disease

Increasingly, young people are given mental health diagnoses from a simple 5 minute checklist. Feeling sad or anxious does not automatically mean that there is something is medically wrong. Discussions need to be thorough; mental illnesses are serious and shouldn't be diagnosed without comprehensive analysis.

DISTRESS CAN INCLUDE

- Feeling anxious before school or social situations
- Feeling sad after a loss or disappointment
- Feeling overwhelmed by pressure or expectations
- Feeling unsure of who you are

None of these feelings are rare, nor are they symptoms of an underlying disease

START WITH SELF REFLECTION

Before labels, start with understanding

DISTRESS	Emotional distress can include sadness, anxiety, stress, or numbness—often tied to change, loss, pressure, or identity questions. These feelings are real and deserve attention, even if they don't mean something is medically wrong
DURATION & IMPACT	Some emotional struggles pass with time and support. Others persist, worsen, or begin to interfere with school, relationships, sleep, or safety. Duration and impact matter more than intensity alone.
SUPPORT OPTIONS	Support can include lifestyle changes, talking with trusted people, therapy, and (sometimes) medication. Each case is unique; different situations call for different treatments.
NEXT STEPS	The goal is not to rush decisions, but to choose next steps with understanding. Asking questions, exploring options, and taking time can help ensure choices are informed and appropriate.

GOALS

Before deciding on a treatment plan, take some time to self-reflect and discuss:

- What specific emotions you are feeling
 - Whether they stem from a specific life event or circumstance
 - What factors might be contributing to the negative feelings
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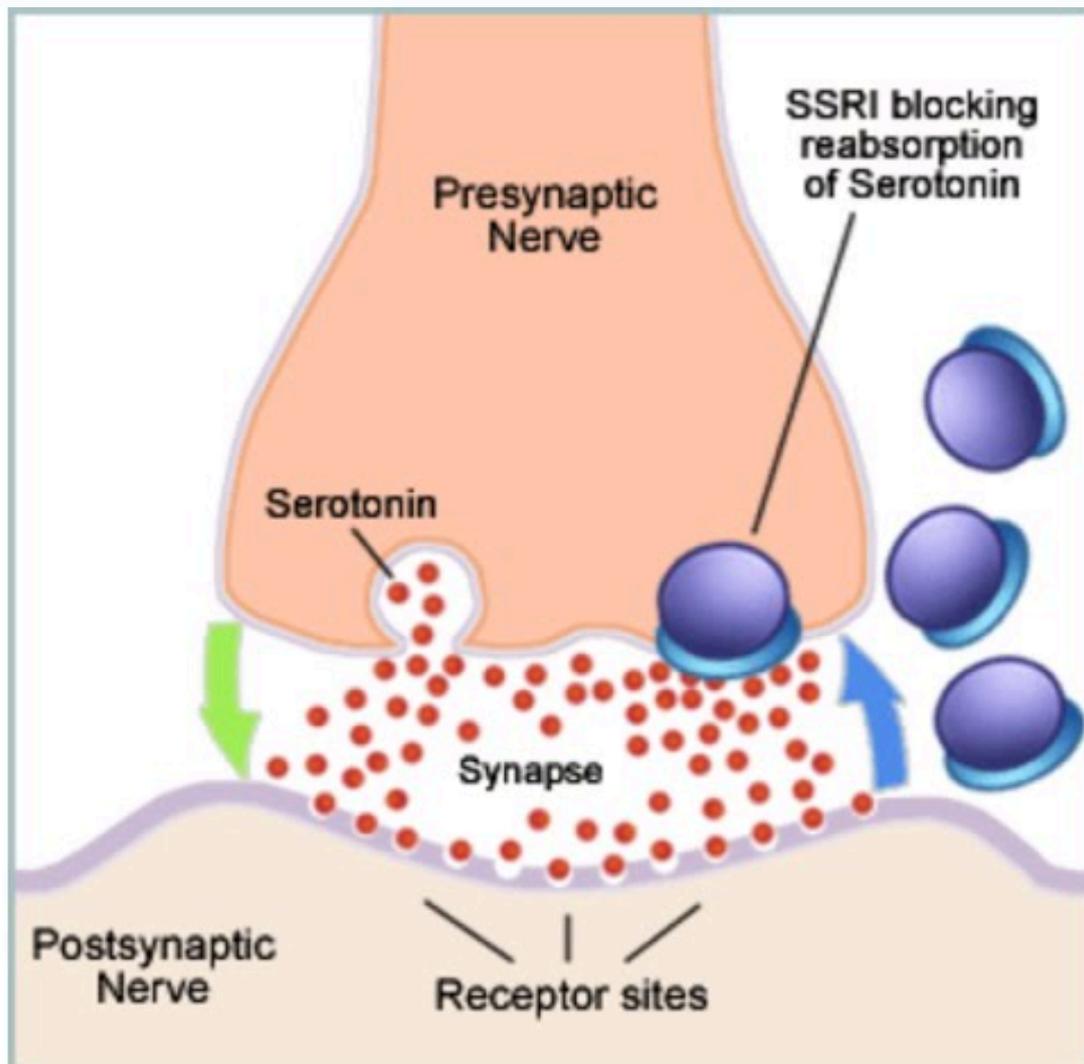
WHAT ARE SSRIs?

SSRIs stand for Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors:

- They are the most common type of antidepressants
- Examples: Zoloft, Celexa, Lexapro, Prozac

HOW DO SSRIS WORK?

- SSRIs work by preventing the reuptake of the neurotransmitter serotonin, leaving more serotonin in the space between neurons
- The increased serotonin levels can help to improve mood and reduce anxiety



THE CHEMICAL IMBALANCE MYTH

For many years, the chemical imbalance theory – the idea that depression is caused by an inherent imbalance of serotonin in the brain – was widely accepted as the truth. But scientists have done scores of experiments, and are yet to find any evidence to support the theory. The chemical imbalance theory is often used as evidence to prescribe SSRIs.

In reality, depression is much more complicated than a simple imbalance. Many factors (diet, exercise, relationships, careers, etc.) all play significant roles. To blame feeling sad or anxious on a genetic malfunction oversimplifies the nature of the problem, and in doing so, overlooks lifestyle changes that could make a difference.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT SSRIs BEFORE BEGINNING

SIDE EFFECTS OF SSRIs

SSRIs carry a tradeoff. Users often report side effects, including but not limited to:

- Emotional Numbing (the dulling of emotion, both negative and positive)
- Sexual dysfunction (numbness, loss of libido, and inability to reach orgasm)
- Sleep disturbances (sleeping too much or having trouble sleeping)
- Flu-like symptoms
- Mood changes

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS OF SSRIs

SSRIs also present side effects when trying to stop treatment, including but not limited to:

- Mood swings and irritability
- Light headedness, dizziness, vertigo
- Insomnia
- Brain zaps (electrical shock sensations in the brain)

Beginning SSRIs is a serious decision. The drugs carry significant side effects, and are often difficult to discontinue without a slow, careful tapering process. You deserve to know the relationship you are entering into before beginning treatment.

85%	80%	5 years
of SSRI users experience side effects, emotional blunting and sexual dysfunction the most common	of SSRI users experience withdrawal symptoms when trying to stop	Average duration of SSRI use in the United States

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAPERING

SSRIs pose a danger when they are stopped, especially if they have been used long-term. The brain adjusts to the constant presence of medication, and is thrown off course when that medication stops.

Antidepressants don't cause cravings, but it can cause dependency, which increases in risk. Sometimes, the discomfort of quitting is misconstrued as evidence that the medication is effective. In reality, that feeling is caused by abruptly stopping a chemical that the brain has become dependent on.

Quitting "cold-turkey" can be quite painful and is not advised. A measured taper is the safest and most effective way to stop SSRIs. This process consists of cutting the dosage by small amounts every week or two until the patient is fully weaned off. Sharp decreases in dosage can exacerbate withdrawal symptoms. Tapering should be monitored closely by a doctor.

Path Forward

Taking an antidepressant is a big decision. It is important to take time and consider alternative options before beginning a prescription. While we recommend trying out therapy and lifestyle changes for multiple months first, sometimes SSRIs can help provide a temporary boost. Nobody should be ashamed for asking for help or for taking SSRIs. But these are serious drugs with serious side effects. Prior to starting, make sure you are aware of how they might affect you.

Most importantly, make sure you take your time in deciding and that your doctor has thoroughly discussed your feelings with you. Don't let your doctor push the drugs on you without a comprehensive intake process.

WHAT TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE BEGINNING TREATMENT

If you decide to try SSRIs, make sure you discuss the following beforehand:

- Length of Treatment
 - Make sure you have an end date in mind
- Tapering Plan
 - Make sure you have a plan in place to stop medication (with doctor supervision)
- Side Effect Management
 - What tradeoffs you are willing to make, and how you will handle side effects when they arise
- Concurrent Treatment
 - Medication is not effective by itself. Make sure you have other options to pair with the drugs (e.g. therapy and lifestyle changes).
- Doctor Supervision
 - Your doctor should check in with you regularly to gauge your progress, assess side effects, and monitoring overall well-being

How To Target Sadness and Anxiety Without Medication

Therapy	Therapy can help understand the root cause of the sadness/anxiety, and can arm the patient with useful coping skills. Talking through problems and identifying areas to give more attention to are effective in boosting mood.
Exercise	Exercise is scientifically proven to ease feelings of sadness and anxiety. Aim to spend at least 150 minutes per week of moderate aerobic activity.
Diet	Diets high in processed foods, sugars, and unhealthy fats are known catalysts of negative emotions. Conversely, food high in nutrients, protein and vegetables boost brain health.
Decrease Screen Time	Scrolling social media and staring at screens is shown to have negative impacts on mental health. Spend as much time as possible offline.
Relationships	Healthy relationships are a great way to combat down feelings. Prioritize spending time with friends and family.
Sunlight	Get outside! Natural light triggers the brain to release serotonin.
Acts of Service	Giving back increases mood and helps reduce stress by releasing serotonin, endorphins and other positive chemicals in the brain.
Balanced Sleep	A stable sleep schedule is important for mental well-being. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night, and, when possible, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.

Our View

At UnScripted, we want all young people and their families to have full information before beginning treatment with antidepressants. We value personal choice. With proper informed consent, teens and their parents can make the right decision for their specific circumstance.

We believe that antidepressants are being overprescribed in America, especially to young people. However, nobody should feel bad about taking medication. We are not here to tell you what to do, or make private decisions for you. We are here to inform you on the trade-offs that come with the drugs so you can choose the best path for your personal well-being.

And most of all, we are here to tell the truth. Don't let anyone tell you that your brain is broken; don't let anyone tell you you have a "chemical imbalance". Your circumstances do not dictate your mental well-being. You always have the control to change your mindset. Everyone is capable of happiness.

Never stop believing in yourself.



YOU ARE NOT BROKEN!

You have more control over depression than you may think. Taking small steps to counter negative emotions adds up. You do not need medication to live a happy life.

For questions, reach out to us!

unscriptedminds.org

