



# Harris County Hospital District

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Heartbreak: Break-Up Blues or Depression?**

HOUSTON (Jan. 22, 2007) – Do you remember the person who broke your heart for the first time? Maybe you were sad for a few days or a few weeks, or perhaps it was longer. Whatever the experience, to most of us, the “breakup blues” were just a part of growing up, a rite of passage. But how do you know when there’s more to the heartbreak?

“It’s normal to feel sad when you’ve had your heart broken,” said Dr. John Sargent, director of child and adolescent psychiatry at Ben Taub General Hospital. “But it’s important to distinguish between the ‘break-up blues,’ which are temporary feelings of unhappiness, and clinical depression, which is serious and requires medical attention.”

Heartbreak can often lead to mild or situational depression, which is temporary and caused by stressful life events, like breakups. Symptoms of sadness and isolation have a known cause and usually go away within a few weeks. However, if symptoms are persistent and interfere with other aspects of a person’s life, there is cause for concern.

“Problems and stress impact mood in a negative way, but this should pass with time,” said Sargent. “It shouldn’t interfere with a person’s participation in everyday life or in school and extracurricular activities.”

While everyone is likely to experience distress after a breakup, some teenagers are more at risk for depression than others. This includes youth who have strained relationships with their parents or siblings, those who display rebellious behavior, and those who engage in risky activities, like drug and alcohol use.

“Teens with these types of problems are more vulnerable to the negative effects of a breakup because they tend to put more stake in the relationship,” said Sargent. “They feel a deeper sense of loss.”

Sargent suggested that parents closely monitor their teens’ relationships, especially the unstable ones that can damage their self-esteem and lead to depression. Unstable relationships include those with a “hot and cold” pattern, where the couple is together one minute and broken up the next, and those in which violence plays a part.

(more)

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Depression affects nearly 10 percent of all teens. If left untreated, it can lead to a full-blown mental health crisis. The most common indicators that a teen is in trouble include:

- Overwhelming/persistent feelings of sadness, grief, anxiety, or hopelessness
- Poor concentration and performance in school
- Irritability
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling tired all of the time; difficulty sleeping or staying awake
- Decreased interest/participation in activities
- Rebellious behavior, like use of drugs and alcohol
- Isolation from friends and family
- Suicidal thoughts or preoccupation with death and dying

“Don’t wait for symptoms to go away or improve by themselves,” said Sargent. “As a parent, you should ask questions and be direct. Ask your child if he or she is thinking of harming themselves and ask them about physical or emotional violence.”

If your child, a friend or a loved one might be suffering from depression, seek help immediately. Parents should talk to a doctor, therapist or social worker as soon as possible. They can also seek help through their child’s school.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation’s third most populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured, underinsured and medically needy residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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