

The Youth Mental Health Project EMPOWERS families and communities to act with the KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS and RESOURCES they need to support the SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, and BEHAVIORAL health of youth.



## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

**W**e all go through periods of sadness. Sadness can be triggered by changes, hurts, disappointments, life events, or loss. Sadness, however, tends to be temporary and does not impact a child's functioning long-term.

Depression:

- is often unrelated to any specific event (although it can be triggered by one);
- often has little or no explanation;
- can be difficult to recognize.

Your child may:

- lose interest in things that used to be enjoyable;
- have a lack of interest that doesn't make complete sense;
- become increasingly irritable, agitated, moody, or lethargic.

Some children or adolescents may even appear to simply be lazy, thoughtless, or careless.

**T**he tricky part about depression in children and teens is that it can be marked by periods of typical behavior, even apparent happiness, and can easily be mistaken for temporary sadness.

*"By the time children hit age 17, the analysis found, 13.6 percent of boys and a staggering 36.1 percent of girls have been or are depressed."*<sup>1</sup>

**T**he fact is that children do not try to feel unhappy, so prolonged or frequent emotional discomfort may be a sign of depression.

The important thing to remember about depression is that the earlier it is recognized and treated, the better the outcome will be.<sup>2</sup>

Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have attentional, learning, conduct or anxiety disorders, are at a higher risk for depression. Depression also tends to run in families.<sup>3</sup>

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

**Remember depression is highly treatable.**

- Reach out to your family doctor and know that you may need a therapist, as well.
- Reach out to your child's school and see if they can offer support for your child.
- Remember to encourage healthy habits for eating, sleeping and exercising.

Keep logs of your child's moods and concerning behaviors. Note frequency, duration and intensity and the impact on your child's ability to function.

Even if it is a short activity, have your child plan something every day that is pleasurable.

**1 in 5**

children in the U.S. has a diagnosable mental health condition, yet less than 20 percent of those youth receive the treatment they need.

1. Ariana Eunjung Cha. "More than a Third of Teenage Girls Experience Depression." Washington Post, 31 May 2017, Accessed 19 Sep. 2017.

2. The Youth Mental Health Project, Mental Health 101: Talking with Kids, 2017

3 American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

4. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

# TYPES

**MAJOR DEPRESSION** may occur more than once throughout your child's life. Your child may experience major depression after a traumatic event such as the death of a relative or friend. There is typically a marked change in behavior (e.g., sleeping, eating, engagement) as well as a withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities.

**DYSTHYMIA.** A less severe but chronic form of depression that lasts for at least two years. While less often diagnosed, children with Dysthymia often present with low mood, low levels of energy, difficulty completing tasks, and a lack of joy (adehonia).

## SYMPTOMS<sup>5</sup>

The behavior of depressed children and teenagers may differ from the behavior of depressed adults. Child and adolescent psychiatrists advise parents to be aware of signs of depression in their youngsters.

If one or more of these signs of depression persist, parents should seek help:

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying.
- Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities.
- Hopelessness.
- Persistent boredom; low energy.
- Social isolation, poor communication.
- Low self-esteem and guilt.
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure.
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility.
- Difficulty with relationships.
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches.
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school.
- Poor concentration.
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns.
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home.
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior.

Note that depression is experienced differently from boys to girls.<sup>6</sup>

### Boys may:

- Show morning fatigue.
- Exhibit overt physical and emotional changes;
- Cut or burn themselves.
- Fight other boys or hurt themselves in aggressive ways like punching a wall.

### Girls may:

- Feel strong emotional guilt, self-blame, failure, and even negative body image.
- Withdraw from family and friends.
- Cry frequently.
- Lose or gain weight or develop eating disorders.
- Express their despair by self-mutilating, cutting or burning themselves.
- Become promiscuous.

The most alarming difference: four times more males die from suicide than females, even though more suicide attempts are made by females.

#### For more information:

The Youth Mental Health Project  
[ymhproject.org](http://ymhproject.org)

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

#### Special thank you to:

Dr. Tara Levinson

5. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

6. YoungMinds