

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

We 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.

The 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.

"Among children aged 2-8 years, boys were more likely than girls to have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder." ¹

It is important to note that depression is experienced differently from boys to girls.

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.

1.9 million

children aged 3-17 years have been diagnosed with depression. ¹ Half of all mental health conditions can start by age 14, but most cases can go undetected and untreated. ²

The most alarming difference: suicide rates among males are 3.7 times higher than females as of 2019. ³

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
2. World Health Organization (WHO)
3. National Institute of Mental Health

TYPES

In 2020, an estimated 3.2 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year. This represents 13.01% of the U.S. population aged 12 to 17.⁴ The number of youth experiencing a major depressive episode has also increased by 99,000 from 2019 to 2020.⁴

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.

SYMPTOMS ⁵

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

4. Mental Health America (MHA)

5. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

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.

The 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.³

Keep in mind that no two people are affected equally by depression, so when it comes to treatments, there is no "one size fits all."³

For more information:

The Youth Mental Health Project
ymhproject.org

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov