

# Depression in Children and Adolescents

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## *How Do Children Get Depressed?*

A loving home, positive and close peer relationships, no economic hardships, academic success and depressed. How does it happen? Those chemicals in our brain take over just like the pancreas refusing to work the way it did for the person who is now diabetic. Life situations sometimes take a toll on a person. Are parents divorcing? Is there domestic violence? Did a friend move away? Is someone close dying? Are there economic struggles? Whether the chemical imbalance is brought on by a change in a person's life situation or whether it just creeps up on a person who was truly enjoying life, depression is real. It does not go away by ignoring it, or by the "just pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality.

## *Signs of Depression in Children and Adolescents*

Symptoms include, but are not limited to, the following that have persisted for two weeks or more:

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- Irritable or sad mood
  - Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once found to be enjoyable
  - Weight loss
  - Weight gain
  - Decrease or increase in sleep, not feeling rested
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Difficulty making decisions
  - Withdrawing from friends or family
  - Thoughts of death, feelings of hopelessness
  - Suicidal ideation, plans or attempts
  - Complaints of body aches or pains
  - Inappropriate blame of others for their problems
  - Easily frustrated
  - Often reacts angrily
  - Decrease in school performance and academic function
  - Skipping school or classes – only able to make it through half the day
  - Somatic complaints that keep the child home
  - Decrease in energy and motivation
  - Self critical and inappropriate guilt
  - Looks sad
  - Change in overall demeanor
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A combination of these symptoms may qualify a person for the diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder.

## *What Can Teachers Do to Help a Depressed Child?*

- If you notice a significant change in a child or adolescents school performance, personality and overall demeanor it may be beneficial to talk with the child or adolescent directly about these changes. Ask if there are any changes at home, any losses, changes in friendships.
- Talk with the person about their change in work habits and performance. Ask if there has been a change in their ability to concentrate and attend to tasks as well as a change in ability to retain information.
- Ask if there has been any difficulty in falling asleep or waking up in the middle of sleep. Refer to the school guidance counselor or another professional for additional help.
- It may help to talk with parents, teachers or friends in regard to any changes they have seen with this child or adolescent. There may be a general consensus that this child looks sad or unhappy. Irritable mood is most often seen in children instead of depressed or sad mood. Withdrawing from or pushing friends away can also be a sign that a child is struggling.

***The hope with depression is that the cure rate is high, with the help of therapy and medication. Early intervention is the key.***

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