

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION IN TEENS

Doll & Associates, S.C.

Who Is Affected by Depression?

Depression affects people of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Young children and older adults are increasingly being diagnosed with depression. Depression is the fourth leading cause of disability and projected to be the second leading cause by 2020.

Depression most commonly begins between ages 20 and 45 but can develop at any age and tends to run in families.

About 5% of kids in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time. Children and teens who have *learning disabilities, conduct, attention or anxiety disorders*, or who have experienced *significant loss or stress* can be at higher risk of depression.

What Is Depression?

Depression is a mood disorder that causes you to feel sad or hopeless for an extended period of time. More than just a case of "the blues" or temporary feelings of grief or low energy, depression can have a significant impact on your enjoyment of life, your work, your health and the people you care about.

Depression can be triggered by stressful life events, other illnesses, certain medications, or genetic predisposition. Although causes of depression are not entirely understood, we know it is linked to an imbalance in brain chemistry. Once the imbalance is corrected, symptoms of depression generally improve.

If a child or teen exhibits one or more of the following symptoms, you should seek the advice of a mental health professional.

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness or crying
- Decreased interest in activities or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- Social isolation, reduced communication with parents or friends
- Problems in concentrating or forgetfulness
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Frequent complaints of illness such as headaches, stomach aches or nausea
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Thoughts or expression of suicide or self-destructive behavior

Some children "internalize" their symptoms, by being tired and moody, lying around or losing interest in life. Others may "externalize" symptoms by acting up at school or home, or by being defiant. Some children may have no idea what they are feeling. Teens may use alcohol or drugs to self medicate depression.

What To Do

Don't put off treatment for your child. Use your child's guidance counselor, teachers or school psychologist as resources. These individuals may be the first to notice changes in your child at school and can be allies in your child's recovery.

How to Treat Depression & Recovery Time

Treatment of depression may include anti-depressant medication, professional counseling such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or a combination of the two. Hospitalization may be necessary if you show warning signs of suicide. It can take 4 to 12 weeks for medications to take effect. You and your physician will work together to find the right treatment.

At least half of those who have had a depressive episode will have a relapse. Continuing to take medication for at least 7 to 15 months after recovery reduces your risk of a relapse.

Beyond medication, these behaviors can help decrease depression:

- Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet
- Exercise regularly or take a daily walk
- Get quality sleep
- Encourage your child to join activities they have enjoyed; try not to isolate from others
- Ask for help and allow friends and family to be supportive
- Make sure your child takes any medications he or she is on
- Let your child know you are supportive and concerned. Express your love
- Accept your child's low energy level – do not call him "lazy" or "selfish" or tell him to "snap out of it"
- Take care of yourself so you can stay healthy
- Do not ignore talk of suicide or death – report these things to treatment professionals and discuss a safety plan with them

Depression is not normal at any age. Treatment is available and important. Depression is often under-diagnosed in children. In children and adolescents, depression might be mistaken for hormonal "moodiness". Sometimes parents of depressed children and teens may also become depressed and need treatment.

The first step is often the hardest. Ask for help. Together, you and your doctor or therapist can decide on a treatment plan to alleviate your depression.

Resources: kidshealth.com and aacap.org

Prepared by clinicians at Doll & Associates, S.C.