



Depression Resource Guide

Overviewⁱ

Kids with depression have chronic feelings of sadness or worthlessness. A child with depression will stay in a dark mood for weeks or months, and often loses interest in things she enjoys. The most common kind of depression is called major depressive disorder, which is a severe episode of depression that tends to last from seven to nine months. Dysthymia is another form of depression that has milder symptoms but may last for years.

Symptomsⁱ

- Unusual sadness, persisting even when circumstances change
- Reduced interest in activities she once enjoyed; reduced feelings of anticipation
- Involuntary changes in weight
- Shifts in sleep patterns
- Sluggishness
- Harsh self-assessment ("I'm ugly. I'm no good. I'll never make friends.")
- Thoughts of or attempts at suicide

Children with depression may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die. Older children or teens may get into trouble at school and be irritable. Because these signs can also be part of normal mood swings associated with certain childhood stages, it may be difficult to accurately diagnose a young person with depression.ⁱⁱ

Causes of Depression^{iii & i}

Many factors can contribute to depression. Studies show that some depressed people have too much or too little of certain brain chemicals. Also, a family history of depression may increase the risk for developing depression. Other factors that can contribute to depression are difficult life events (such as death, divorce, or trauma), side-effects from some medications and negative thought patterns.

Treating Child/Adolescent Depressionⁱⁱⁱ

It is extremely important that depressed children/teens receive prompt, professional treatment.

Depression is serious and, if left untreated, can worsen to the point of becoming life-threatening. If depressed teens refuse treatment, it may be necessary for family members or other concerned adults to seek professional advice.

Therapy can help children/teens understand why they are depressed and learn how to cope with stressful situations. Depending on the situation, treatment may consist of individual, group or family counseling. Medications that can be prescribed by a psychiatrist may be necessary to help teens feel better.



Some of the most common and effective ways to treat depression in adolescents are (these methods are also used with younger children):

- *Psychotherapy* provides teens an opportunity to explore events and feelings that are painful or troubling to them. Psychotherapy also teaches them coping skills.
- *Cognitive-behavioral therapy* helps teens change negative patterns of thinking and behaving.
- *Interpersonal therapy* focuses on how to develop healthier relationships at home and at school.
- *Medication* relieves some symptoms of depression and is often prescribed along with therapy.

When depressed youth recognize the need for help, they have taken a major step toward recovery. However, remember that few youth seek help on their own. They may need encouragement from their friends and support from concerned adults to seek help and follow treatment recommendations.

Dealing With Pressures Outside of Therapyⁱⁱⁱ

When youth feel down, there are ways they can cope with these feelings to avoid serious depression. All of these suggestions help develop a sense of acceptance and belonging that is so important to youth.

- *Try to make new friends.* Healthy relationships with peers are central to youths' self-esteem and provide an important social outlet.
- *Participate in sports, job, school activities or hobbies.* Staying busy helps youth focus on positive activities rather than negative feelings or behaviors.
- *Join organizations that offer programs for young people.* Special programs geared to the needs of adolescents help develop additional interests.
- *Ask a trusted adult for help.* When problems are too much to handle alone, youth should not be afraid to ask for help.

ⁱ Child Mind Institute (2015). Quick Facts on Depression. <http://www.childmind.org/en/quick-facts-depression/>

ⁱⁱ National Institute of Mental Health (2015). Depression. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression-easy-to-read/index.shtml#pub4>

ⁱⁱⁱ Mental Health America (2015). Depression in Teens. <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/depression-teens>