

Facts Families Should Know About Children & Depression



All children can be at risk of developing problems with depression. Families today face a lot of stress. Young children, as well as older ones, sometimes have trouble coping and can become depressed. This depression can even lead to suicide, which is one of the leading causes of death for teenagers.

How can you recognize the signs of depression? What can you do to help your child? How should you react if you believe your child is considering suicide? It's important for you to know the facts—and to know how to help your child.

QuickTip

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What Can You Do About Depression?

- **Take your concern seriously.** If you think your child may be suffering from depression, trust your feelings. If you think something is wrong with your child, *you're probably right.*
- **It's important to get help** if you think your child suffers from depression. Depression is not "just a phase" children go through. Children with depression need help. Start by talking with your school counselor or your doctor—today. They may suggest places you can turn to for help. You may want to consider:
 - **Counseling for your child.** It can help to talk about problems, past events and feelings.
 - **Family counseling.** Depression can affect everyone at home. Family counseling can help everyone deal with it.
 - **Group counseling with other children.** Some school counselors lead groups during lunch hours or after school.



What Can You Do to Prevent Suicide?

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the number of youth suicides is extremely high. They list many causes for suicides, including family changes, substance abuse, bullying and other stresses of school.

If you are concerned your child may be at risk, you can:

- **Talk with your child about the subject.** Let your child know that you care and you want to help. Perhaps the most important message you can give your child is, "You matter to me." Your child needs to hear you say it—often.
- **Take any suicide threat seriously.** If your child talks about suicide, make sure to see a doctor or a counselor—immediately.
- **Restrict access to guns,** which are now used in a growing number of youth suicides.
- **Help your child take part** in activities that help build a positive self-image.
- **Report bullying incidents** to the school or local authorities.

What Is Depression?

Depression is marked by sadness. It leads to inactivity. Thinking clearly is difficult and it's hard to concentrate. Some depression is normal. It's called sadness or grieving. But persistent sadness or grief that interferes with daily functioning is not normal. When it becomes hopelessness, it may be serious depression.

Symptoms of Depression

Be aware of the symptoms of depression in children. They include:

- **School difficulties**, poor grades and not getting along with teachers or peers.
- **Restlessness**, grouchiness, sulkiness, aggression.
- **Hiding out** in their bedrooms.
- **Withdrawal from activities** they used to enjoy.
- **Sleeplessness** or sleeping more than normal.
- **Weight gain or loss.**
- **Unwillingness to participate** in family activities.
- **Extreme or sudden mood changes.**
- **Abuse of drugs or alcohol.**

Suicide Signs & Signals

Suicide can be prevented. But families need to know what to look for. If your child shows any of these signs, please seek professional help immediately. Some signs include:

- **Deep sadness**, lack of energy, loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, difficulty in concentrating.
- **Failure in school**, often accompanied by disinterest or feelings of helplessness.
- **Social isolation**, a lack of close friends—even though there may be some contact with a group of peers.
- **Anxiety over discord or disruption** in the family—divorce, separation, alcoholism and physical or sexual abuse.
- **Extreme sadness following a recent death or suicide attempt** by a loved one or family member.
- **Unusual sleep** and eating patterns.
- **Talking about feeling like a failure.** Talking about suicide. Comments such as “The only way out is for me to die,” or “You won’t be seeing me around anymore.”
- **Collecting pills**, razor blades, knives, ropes or guns.
- **Giving away personal possessions.**
- **Writing a suicide note.**
- **A previous suicide attempt.**

Your Help Is Critical

Some signs of depression may be visible to a child’s teachers at school. But you are likely to see the earliest symptoms at home.

Know the signs of depression. Be aware of the danger signals of suicide. Seek help at the first signs of a problem. Remember, if you think your child may be suffering from depression, you are probably right. Get help right away.

If you need help, talk with your child’s teacher, your school principal or counselor. Talk with your family doctor or religious advisor. Find out how to contact your local mental health agency.

Need Support Now?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available.

Call or text 988.

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