

Recognizing Depression in Children and Teens

Introduction

Depression is a disease that causes ongoing sadness. It is a common problem in children and teens. Being sad sometimes is normal. But if your child or teen is depressed, this can lead to serious problems. Your child may have trouble in school or at home. They may lose interest in hobbies and activities. Sometimes depression can lead to substance abuse, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. There are effective treatments for depression, such as antidepressants and talk therapy.

This reference summary explains common signs of depression in children and teens. It also explains the causes of and treatments for depression.

Depression

Feeling sad is a normal reaction to stressful situations in life. Some examples of situations that may lead to feeling sad include:

- Being sick.
- Losing someone you love.
- Having problems at school.

Most people are able to overcome feeling sad. But some people are not able to cope well. Their sadness may become overwhelming. This is a sign of depression. Depression is when a person feels sad all the time. Their feelings may interfere with family life, school or work.

Sometimes feelings of depression become so strong that a person may consider suicide. If you or someone you know is considering suicide, contact a health care provider right away. Depression is a disease. Treatment is available and usually successful.



Signs of Depression in Children and Teens

Depression causes feelings of sadness that may not go away on their own. It may cause feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness. But symptoms of depression in children and teens may be different than those in adults.

Common signs of depression in children and teens include:

- Eating more or eating less.
- Mood swings.
- Poor hygiene or dress.
- Weight loss or weight gain.

Depression may cause problems at school. You may notice a drop in your child's grades. They may have trouble concentrating. They may try to stay home from school often. Sometimes depression can cause physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. Your child or teen may lose interest in their normal activities if they are depressed. Your child may not want to see his or her friends often.

Some children and teens with depression may engage in unsafe behaviors. These can include unsafe sex or breaking the law. They may abuse substances like alcohol or illegal drugs. These substances may make depression worse. Call your child's health care provider right away if your child talks about self-harm, like cutting or suicide.

Signs of suicide plans may include:

- Giving away possessions.
- Saying goodbye to loved ones.
- Writing or talking about dying or suicide.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

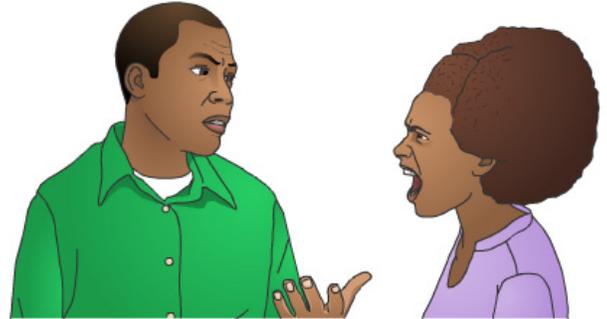
Causes

The cause of depression in children and teens is not always known. It is often a combination of different reasons.

Depression is sometimes caused by chemicals in the brain that affect a child's mood. Depression can also be caused by a change in the balance of hormones in the body. Hormones are chemicals in the body that help control the actions of certain cells and organs.

Stressful situations also can cause depression in children and teens. These situations include:

- Breakups.
- Illness.
- Moving to a new town.
- Trouble in school.



Other life problems can cause depression, including:

- Abuse during childhood.
- Having an illness that lasts a long time.
- Problems with friends.



Girls are more likely to be depressed at a young age than boys. Gay or transgendered children and teens have a greater chance of depression than others. If your child or teen is depressed, he or she may abuse substances like alcohol or illegal drugs. These substances can make depression worse and last longer. Depression can sometimes happen with other mental health issues, such as anxiety and eating disorders.

Diagnosis

Your child's health care provider will talk to your child about their social and medical history. They will ask about symptoms and family history. They also may talk to family members about any changes in behavior.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Your health care provider may choose to do a blood test. They may take images of your child's brain. This can help make sure the symptoms are not caused by any other diseases or disorders.

Treatment

Depression in children and teens is usually treated with a combination of medication and counseling.

Medications called antidepressants can be helpful in treating depression. But they are not as effective in teens as they are in adults. They may raise the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in children and teens. It may take time to find the right medication for your child. It may take 2 to 8 weeks for your child to benefit from antidepressants. They are not usually addictive. Talk to your child's health care provider about potential side effects.



Your child should not stop taking his or her antidepressant medications when he or she starts to feel better. Stopping treatment or missing several doses can cause withdrawal-like symptoms. Quitting suddenly may cause depression to worsen. Therapy is also used to treat depression. The most common therapy used for depression is called psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy can help your child or teen:

- Learn about his or her condition.
- Focus on his or her feelings, thoughts, moods and behaviors.

Psychotherapy also can help your child or teen:

- Adjust to difficult situations.
- Find healthy ways to cope with his or her feelings.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

If your child or teen is in danger of hurting himself or herself or someone else, they may need to be treated in a health care facility. This is rare. Healthy relationships are important when treating depression. Let your child or teen know that you are available to talk with them when needed. Encourage your child to spend time with good friends.

Exercise can also help treat depression. Make sure your child is active for at least 30 minutes per day. Allow him or her to spend time outside when possible. Feed him or her a healthy diet. Talk to your child or teen about substance abuse.

Try not to create a stressful environment for your child or teen. Avoid too many activities or demanding situations. Make sure your child knows that it is okay if his or her performance in school or in sports is not perfect.

Summary

Depression is a disease that causes ongoing sadness. It is a common problem in children and teens.

Common signs of depression in children and teens include:

- Eating more or eating less.
- Mood swings.
- Poor hygiene or dress.
- Weight loss or weight gain.



The cause of depression in children and teens is not always known. It is often a combination of different reasons, including chemicals in the brain, hormonal changes and stressful situations. Depression in children and teens is usually treated with a combination of medication and counseling. Healthy relationships are important when treating depression. Let your child or teen know that you are available to talk with them when needed. Encourage your child to spend time with good friends.

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.