Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)
MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Depression in Children and Teens

Signs & Symptoms

- Sad mood/Hopelessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Isolating/Withdrawing from family and friends
- Decreased energy/Fatigue
- Thinking about death, suicide
- Feeling things are their fault
- Sleep and/or appetite changes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tearfulness/Frequent crying
- Agitation/Irritability/Anger
- Inability to invision a future
- Declining grades
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomach aches)
- Alcohol/Drug use

While people used to think that depression only occurred in adults, we now know that children and adolescents can also experience depression. In fact, on average, approximately 3% of children ages 3-17 have a diagnosis of depression. That rate increases by 6-10% during adolescence1,2. While many children experience down moods, the symptoms of depression should not be ignored.

Pointers for Caregivers

- Ask how your child is feeling or what is bothering them
- Listen to your child's concerns and provide support
- Encourage open and honest conversations
- Acknowledge their feelings without judgment
- Be with your child, whether doing an activity or just keeping them company
- Promote good self-care and support routine
- Reduce stress (especially for teens)
- Watch for signs of suicide
- Eliminate access to medications, weapons, and substances
- Create a safety plan, if needed

Supporting a Child in the Moment

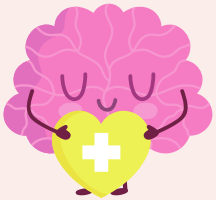
Create spaces for connection

Provide healthy meals

Encourage ample amounts of sleep

Keep them moving

Long-Term Help



- Signs and symptoms of depression go on for 2 weeks or more
- Behavior is different from their "usual self"
- Depression interferes with daily activities
- Child talks, jokes, writes about suicide
- Child makes statements like, "I can't go on", "There's no way out"

1Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2021). Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health. www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html#ref
2Mental Health America (MHA). (2021). Prevalence of Mental Illness 2021. mhanational.org/issues/2021/mental-health-america-prevalence-data

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