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## Depression in Children

Adults often view childhood as a stage of life without many cares or responsibilities. For years, many therapists shared this view, feeling that children were too emotionally undeveloped to suffer some psychiatric illnesses. Today we understand that children, like adults, can experience even severe depression. In fact, nearly three percent of young children and up to 10 percent of adolescents may have symptoms serious enough to warrant a clinical diagnosis of depression.

### Symptoms of Depression in Children

Recognizing the symptoms of childhood depression can be difficult. Parents expect a certain amount of turmoil in their children's lives as they develop. They may be uncertain whether their child's behavior is normal sadness or a sign of something more serious. Professionals are reluctant to make the diagnosis of clinical depression for fear that the child may feel stigmatized by such a label.

Some children display the classic symptoms of depression like sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, restlessness, eating disorders and sleeping problems. Other children's depression manifests through physical problems, such as stomachaches and headaches, for which there are no medical explanations. Still others hide their feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness under a cover of irritability, aggression, hyperactivity and misbehavior.

Complicating the recognition of depression is the progression of developmental stages through which children pass on the way to adulthood. Negativism, clinging or rebellion may be normal and temporary expressions of a particular stage and not necessarily signs of depression. In addition, children go through temporary depressed moods just as adults do. Careful observation lasting several weeks may be required to determine if a child is genuinely depressed.

According to the National Institute for Mental Health, symptoms that a child is depressed may include:

- Persistent sad or irritable mood;
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed;
- Significant change in appetite or body weight;
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping;
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation (nervous energy or lethargy);
- Loss of energy;
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt;
- Difficulty concentrating; and
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

When symptoms of depression seem severe, continue for more than a few weeks or interfere with your child's school or play, your pediatrician should evaluate your child to rule out physical illness. Once the doctor rules out physical explanations, an evaluation by a mental-health professional experienced in treating children is in order.

Like adult depression, childhood depression can be treated very successfully with a combination of traditional psychotherapy, play therapy and medication. If left untreated, childhood depression can have devastating consequences including failure in school, difficulties in family and peer relationships and even suicide.

**For Additional Support**

Call us for the support that you need. 1-888-290-4EAP (TDD: 1-800-697-0353) or go to [www.GuidanceResources.com](http://www.GuidanceResources.com), Agency ID: FEDSOURCE

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