

Childhood Depression

Depression before puberty is very uncommon. Fewer than one percent of young children are depressed. There is some evidence that young children who get depressed are more likely than other groups to have a strong family history of depression.

What Are the Signs of Childhood Depression?

The features of depression in young children are much the same as in adolescents or adults. The child's moodiness starts to interfere with his or her life. You may find that his or her unhappiness makes you feel unhappy, and you may begin to worry about the child more often. If the child's moodiness takes the form of being irritable and bad-tempered, then you may notice that you try to avoid situations which would be upsetting. You may also find that the child is getting into more arguments with friends. Teachers and Friends may even contact you and say that they are worried about your child.

Because the depressed child finds it difficult to concentrate, he or she may become less interested in schoolwork and grades may suffer. There may also be a change in the child's activity level. Activities and hobbies that used to be enjoyable now seem to be a burden or boring. Excuses are made to avoid seeing friends.

During a period of depression, a child's bodily functions may also be affected. There may be changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, and weight loss or gain. Some children become listless and seem tired all day long. Other children become very edgy and agitated.

A depressed child is often very self-critical. The child will state that he or she keeps messing up and is self-critical for no apparent reason.

Finally, your child may persistently discuss death and dying or may even threaten or attempt suicide.

What Kind of Treatments are Available?

Several different types of psychotherapy or counseling are used in treating childhood depression. Some of the more recently introduced antidepressants also appear to be effecting and seem to have fewer side effects than antidepressants that were in common use a few years back. A psychiatrist or psychologist should be able to make the decision about the most appropriate form of treatment. It is reasonable to expect at least 4-5 children who become depressed will improve significantly after receiving treatment.