

Depression in Kids and Adolescents

What is Depression?

Depression is a treatable illness in which feelings of sadness, irritability, or inability to enjoy life persist and interfere with a person's ability to function at his or her normal level. Although it's normal for children and adolescents to experience moodiness, sometimes it becomes more severe.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

When severe, these symptoms may indicate depression. Talk to a professional for an assessment if you are concerned.

- Feeling or seeming sad, down, or blue
- Frequent crying
- Acting irritable, easily annoyed, or touchy
- Less interested in things that he or she usually likes
- Spending less time with friends and family
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness or low self-esteem
- Declining academic performance
- Feeling fatigued or less energetic
- Intentional self-harm
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts

How is Depression Different in Children and Adolescents Compared to Adults?

The basic features of depression are similar in youth and adults, but there are some differences due to development in children and adolescents.

- Depression is more likely to present as irritability in children and adolescents
- Children and adolescents may have more mood lability (moods quickly changing)
- Children and adolescents might complain about feeling sick or having aches and pains, throw temper tantrums, and withdraw from others

Types of Depressive Disorders

Talk to a mental health professional to get more information about these disorders.

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia)
- Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder

How to Treat Anxiety Disorders

These are evidence-based ways to treat depression:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- CBT is based on the idea that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected.
- The therapist helps the client to identify and correct distorted thinking and increase healthy behaviors.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)

- In IPT, depression is seen as being related to one's relationships with other people
- Clients learn effective communication and problem-solving skills.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

- DBT combines mindfulness and CBT
- This highly-structured program is well-suited to adolescents with self-harm and suicidality concerns
- DBT provides clients with skills to manage intense emotional instability

Suicidality

Any indication that a child or adolescent may be considering suicide should be taken seriously.

If you are concerned about suicide:

- Contact a mental health professional
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - 800-273-8255 (TALK)
- If there is imminent risk of self-harm, call 911 or go to the Emergency Department
- Be physically and emotionally available for your child or adolescent
- Do not leave your child or adolescent alone
- Remove or lock up dangerous things in the home, such as guns, knives, razors, and medications.