

Symptoms of Depression in Children/Adolescents

Depression symptoms in children are similar to those seen in adults, however children do not often recognize that they are experiencing depression. It is very important as a parent/caregiver that you are able to recognize the symptoms of depression in your child in order to obtain and receive treatment. As a result of parents/caregivers often not recognizing the symptoms of depression, most children with depression never receive any type of psychological or medical treatment. Children are not usually capable of telling anyone their feelings due to their cognitive/developmental level and it is up to you to know the symptoms.

Depression is diagnosed by a qualified mental health professional and an evaluation is needed to determine if your child has depression. Questions that will be asked during the evaluation are asked to see if your child qualifies for clinical depression, which is diagnosed through the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). Symptoms that are usually seen from an emotional standpoint in psychotherapy are sadness, children feel hopeless and they seem to cry all the time. They are usually withdrawn and when asked what is wrong they respond by saying, “nothing” or they do not even recognize that they are withdrawn and not speaking to anyone. They are often stressed or anxious by the smallest things and are irritated when you ask them simple questions or to complete small chores around the house. Parents often describe this as being very “touchy” and will remark, “I can’t say anything to her without her getting mad or upset.” In addition, they are often angry and all of a sudden do not want to hang out with their friends and they quit activities or interests that they were once very involved in.

A child with depression often exhibits acting out behaviors and at home and at school they become impulsive and do not think about what they are doing. Parents will say, “he has been getting into trouble, he has never been in any kind of trouble before.” They become absorbed often with staying in their room by themselves or they sit and play video games for hours or watch television, but do not want to see to do anything else. Self-injurious behaviors are also exhibited by children that are depressed and they seem to want to inflict physical pain on themselves in order to feel better. Some children become very demanding of their parent’s time and do not want to see to let their parents out of their sight for any period of time and are often insecure.

In addition, children that are depressed have difficulty concentrating on what they are doing and are “scattered” and do not seem to be able to get themselves organized. They often make very self-deprecating remarks and will describe themselves as “ugly” or “stupid”, where they once would never had such a thing about themselves. These children often feel guilty, have low self-esteem, have feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, and are very negative about themselves, others, and their situation. As a result of what is happening to them on an emotional level, these children will often display physical symptoms from their depression. Remember, the mind controls the body, and not the other way around. Often there will be a change in appetite

or their weight and their weight will fluctuate. They all of a sudden may have difficulty sleeping, complains of feeling tired; fatigued and having no energy, and often are unmotivated to do anything other than sit around the house.

If these symptoms describe your child, please take him/her to a doctor or mental health professional in order to have him/her evaluated for clinical depression.

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