



Recognizing Depression in Youth

Depression strikes youth and adolescents far more often than most people realize. Children who experience depression are not just in a bad mood and misbehaving. Depression negatively impacts their lives by interfering with their ability to perform at their best level. By recognizing depression and getting treatment for affected child(ren), parents can improve their child(ren)'s chances of living a higher quality, healthier life. Below are some helpful signs and symptoms to assist parents in identifying possible depression in their child(ren). Parents should consider depression when the change in their child(ren)'s behavior lasts over two weeks and impacts their daily life.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression in Youth:

- Uncontrollable anger with aggressive and/or destructive behavior, such as hitting themselves and/or others, kicking, self-biting, head banging
- Harming animals
- Continual disobedience
- Easily frustrated, frequent crying, low self-esteem, overly sensitive
- Inability to pay attention, remember and/or make decisions
- Easily distracted, mind goes blank
- Energy fluctuations from lethargic to frenzied activity, with periods of normalcy
- Eating and/or sleeping problems
- Bedwetting, constipation and/or diarrhea
- Impulsiveness, accident-prone
- Chronic worry and/or fear, excessively clingy, frequent panic attacks
- Extreme self-consciousness
- Slowed speech and/or body movements
- Disorganized speech - hard to follow when telling a story, etc.
- Other medical causes or physical symptoms such as dizziness, headaches, stomachaches, body aches, nail-biting, and/or pulling out hair

- Suicidal talk or attempts
- Concern regarding decline in grades
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Getting in trouble or exhibiting risky behaviors
- Statements of wanting to die

What Parents Can Do:

- Be aware of troubling behaviors and note how long these behaviors have been going on, how often they occur, and how severe they seem.
- See a mental health professional or the child(ren)'s doctor for evaluation and diagnosis.
- Get accurate information from libraries, helplines and other sources.
- Ask questions about treatments and services.
- Talk to other families in the community with similar problems.
- Find a family support group.

Depression in youth may be disguised in other ways such as avoidance or phobia of school, avoidance or phobia of social situations, excessive separation anxiety, running away, obsessions, compulsions, and/or the fear that something bad may happen. Depression is a real illness that requires professional help. Early diagnosis is essential for treating depressed children. Comprehensive treatment often includes both individual and family therapy. For help, parents should talk to their child's school social worker or school counselor for support and/or a referral to a mental health professional. Services can be found through your insurance company or local community services board.

Adapted from National Alliance on Mental Illness: nami.org and The American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry.