

DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Depressed children may behave differently than depressed adults. They may not seem sad or unhappy but display other symptoms characteristic of depression in young people. Depression makes children and adolescents at higher risk for illness and difficulties with social and psychological behaviour. It also increases their risk for substance abuse and suicidal behaviour.

Depression in children and adolescents often goes unrecognised by families and physicians. If you suspect your child or teen is depressed, please review the list of symptoms below. If they seem to describe what he or she is experiencing, please take this list to his or her physician and discuss your concerns.

1. Persistent feelings of sadness.
2. Unstable mood with rapidly changing mood swings, sometimes triggered by seemingly insignificant events.
3. Difficulty concentrating, which may lead to decreased performance in school or skipping school.
4. Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed or things that were once pleasurable.
5. Loss of interest in friends or family members, increased isolation and social withdrawal.
6. Feelings of hopelessness.
7. Exhibiting antisocial or rebellious behaviour at school or at home.
8. Increased irritability, anger, or hostility.
9. Play involving excessive aggression towards self or others, or persistently sad themes.
10. Inability to stop worrying.
11. Change in normal sleeping pattern, either difficulty sleeping (insomnia), waking early in the morning, or sleeping more than usual (hypersomnia).
12. Change in appetite or weight, either:
 - Loss of appetite or abnormal weight loss (when not dieting).
 - Increase in appetite or abnormal weight gain.
13. Increase in activity (restless energy) or always overtired.
14. Frequent physical complaints (headaches, muscle pains, or abdominal pains, for example) that do not improve with treatment.
15. Difficulty coping with everyday activities or responsibilities.
16. Feeling as though everyone is against them.
17. Increased use of street drugs or alcohol.
18. Involvement in high-risk behaviours, including sexual promiscuity.
19. Inappropriate guilt, shame, and blame.
20. Loss of interest in own physical appearance or personal hygiene.
21. Suicidal thoughts or actions; talk of wanting to be dead.

Sources:

Mental Health America, "Depression in Children," 2007.
<http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=CA866E0D-1372-4D20-C8872863D2EE2E90> (accessed March 13, 2007).

Grant Mullen, M.D., *Emotionally Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003), p. 78.