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Depression in Adolescents and Children: **Differences and Interventions for Teachers & Parents**

Symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder Common to Adults, Children, and Adolescents

Persistent sad or irritable mood
Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
Significant change in appetite or body weight
Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
Psychomotor agitation or retardation
Loss of energy
Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
Difficulty concentrating
Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

* Five or more of these symptoms must persist for 2 or more weeks before a diagnosis of major depression is indicated (other exclusions also apply).

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Signs That May Be Associated with Depression in Children and Adolescents

Frequent vague, non-specific physical complaints such as headaches, muscle aches, stomachaches or tiredness
Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
Talk of or efforts to run away from home
Outbursts of shouting, complaining, unexplained irritability, or crying
Being bored
Lack of interest in playing with friends
Alcohol or substance abuse
Social isolation, poor communication
Fear of death
Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
Reckless behavior
Difficulty with relationships

National Institute of Mental Health. (2000). *Depression in children and adolescents: A fact sheet for physicians* (NIH Publication No. 00-4744). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

What Can Teachers or Parents Do?

- Offer experiences for success
 - Depressed kids do not feel part of things and tend to overfocus on their failures and see failures more often
 - Individual, group activities
 - Help them feel part of what is going on, a sense of belonging, and that they are doing something important
- Give them simple tasks and reward with a lot of praise, encouragement, & attention – so they can feel special (especially if they like to be helpful or please others)
 - School – deliver things to the office, be a class or hall monitor, work on a mural or special project that is fun or of interest, shadow principal for the day
 - Home – set the table, help w/ cooking, help a parent do a job
- Increase as much positive feedback as possible about their work, activities
- Counselors at school can meet with them periodically, informally to provide support, warmth, acceptance, and empathy for their feelings
- Engage them in conversation – especially if highly withdrawn
- Call on them more in class – because a depressed child is not going to initiate conversations as much – they need to be drawn out
- Provide opportunities to exercise, physical activities are important b/c depression often reduces energy level, and exercise can increase energy and brain chemicals
- Carefully/tactfully confront some of the beliefs they have that are irrational or not based on reality (e.g., “I’m never going to get an “A” on a test,”) – by pointing out past successes in that area, if older, can ask for the evidence that supports that belief
- Don’t give up on a child who seems depressed
- Support them
- Show them understanding and compassion but hold them accountable

References used for presentation:

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

National Institute of Mental Health. (2000). *Depression* (NIH Publication No. 02-3561).

Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Institute of Mental Health. (2000). *Depression in children and adolescents: A fact sheet for physicians* (NIH Publication No. 00-4744). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Institute of Mental Health (2002). *Child and adolescent mental health*. Retrieved October 25, 2003, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/childmenu.cfm>

Informational Resources (found on the NIMH website)

National Institute of Mental Health
Office of Communications
Information Resources and Inquiries Branch
6001 Executive Boulevard, Rm. 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
(301) 443-4513
Mental Health FAX 4U: (301) 443-5158
E-mail: nimhinfo@nih.gov
NIMH home page: www.nimh.nih.gov

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20016
(202) 966-7300
www.aacap.org

American Psychiatric Association
1400 K Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 682-6000
www.psych.org

American Psychological Association
750 First Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 336-5500
www.apa.org

Child & Adolescent Bipolar Foundation
1187 Willmette Avenue, PMB #331
Willmette, IL 60091
(847) 256-8525
www.bpkids.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201
Phone: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or (703) 524-7600
<http://www.nami.org>

Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
730 N. Franklin St. - #501
Chicago, IL 60610-7224
(312) 988-1150
Fax: (312) 642-7243
www.DBSAAlliance.org

National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
2001 N. Beauregard Street, 12th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
Phone: 1-800-969-6942 or (703) 684-7722
TTY-800-443-5959
<http://www.nmha.org>

National Institutes of Health
National Library of Medicine's clinical trials database
www.clinicaltrials.gov

Other Helpful Websites:

<http://www.aboutourkids.org> - The New York University Child Study Center website

<http://www.connectforkids.org> - Sponsored by the National Education Association and Casey Family Programs

<http://www.mentalhealth.org> - United States Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA) - National Mental Health Information Center

<http://www.ldanatl.org> - Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

<http://www.chadd.org> - Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
(CHADD)

<http://www.add.org> - Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA)

<http://www.help4adhd.org> - National Resource Center on AD/HD (A Program of CHADD)

<http://www.addhelpline.org> - Website by parents who have a child with AD/HD w/ resources