

Depression in Children and Adolescents



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Depression is more than being sad or going through a rough patch. It is a serious mental health condition that requires understanding and medical care. Some people have only one episode in a lifetime, but for most people depression happens multiple times and may last a few months to several years. Depression affects all people and is somewhat common, although young adults are more likely to have depression than those who are older.

How often do children get depression?

Depression in school age children (between 6-12 years) and younger is not as common, but with puberty rates of depression increase. Also, in puberty, girls become higher risk than boys for depression. About 20% of youth will have one or more episodes of major depression by the time they become adults.

Do children with depression need treatment?

Episodes of depression in children last 6-9 months on average but for some, they last for years. When children are depressed, they can have difficulties at school and in relationships and are at an increased risk of suicide. Effective treatments are available, so depression should be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

How can you tell if your child is depressed?

Some signs of depression in children may be:

- Talking about feeling sad often
- Talking about suicide
- Having difficulties in school or at home
- No longer enjoying activities they once did.
- Isolating from friends and family
- Irritable

What are the treatments for depressed children and adolescents?

There are two main groups of treatments for the depressed child. When deciding which treatment is best the youth, their family and clinician should work together. Specific treatment plans may change after of 3-4 months and many youths will need to try multiple forms of treatment. Treatment is an ongoing process. The types of treatments are:

1. **Psychotherapy** such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT).
2. **Medications** Research around the risks and impacts of antidepressants on children is ongoing. Talk with a health care provider before giving any medications to children.

