

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Depression in Children and Adolescents Information for Parents and Caregivers

Definition

Children with symptoms of depression show behaviors that cause problems in getting along with others and difficulties in school. The symptoms may include being irritable or grouchy, losing interest in daily activities, losing interest in friends, complaints about feeling ill (especially stomach and head aches), and doing poorly in school.

Why do we care?

When compared to their developmental peers:

- Children who display symptoms of depression have lower levels of academic performance.
- Children who display symptoms of depression are more likely to attempt suicide.
- Children who display symptoms of depression are more likely to have unprotected sex.
- Children who display symptoms of depression are more likely to abuse substances.

What can we do about it?

- **Actively observe your child's behavior around the house.** Consider how and where your children spend their time – in their room alone, outside with peers, in front of the television.
- **Think about the factors at home that may contribute to the child's symptoms of depression.** Write these down on a piece of paper and bring them with you when meeting with school staff.
- **Learn how to identify “cries for help” from children and adolescents with depression.** Know when your child needs immediate attention from you or a specialist.
- **Ask teachers and school clinicians about available resources in the community.** Attempt to enroll your child in a recreational league or youth organization that utilizes their strengths and talents.
- **Seek a specialist's opinion of psychiatric treatments for depression.** Visit the library to read more about the different types of medicine prescribed for depression.

Helpful Forms and Handouts

- AACAP Facts for Families
 - The Depressed Child: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/depressd.htm>
 - Children and Grief: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/grief.htm>
 - Teen Suicide: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/suicide.htm>
 - Psychotherapies for Children and Adolescents:
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/86.htm>
 - Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents: How Medications are Used:
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/psychmed.htm>
 - Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents:: Types of Medications:
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/29.htm>
 - Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents: Questions to Ask:
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/medquest.htm>

- National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2005). *Family guide: What families should know about adolescent depression and treatment options*. Retrieve February 8, 2008 from http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/CAAC/Family_Guide_final.pdf.
- National Association of School Psychologists:
 - Depression in Children and Adolescents: Information for Families and Educators. <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/social%20template.pdf>
 - Times of Tragedy: Preventing Suicide in Troubled Children and Youth, Part I: Tips for Parents and Schools http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicidept1_general.aspx
 - Cash, R. (2004). When it hurts to be a teenager. *Principal Leadership Magazine*, 4(2). http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/nassp_depression.aspx
- National Mental Health Association Fact Sheets: <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets>
 - ¿Qué es la depresión?: <http://www.nmha.org/depression/queesladepresion.cfm>
 - Depression: <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/21.cfm>
 - Depression in Teens: <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/24.cfm>
 - Dysthymic Disorder: <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/26.cfm>
- Texas Department of State Health Services:
 - Suicide: What should a parent know?: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/78D.pdf>
 - Suicide: What should I know? (for adolescents): <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/79D.pdf>
 - Childhood Depression (for children 6-12): <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/13D.pdf>
 - Life Can Be Tough (for adolescents): <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/12D.pdf>
 - A Kid's Guide to Asking Questions about Medication: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/22.pdf>
 - Kris, Are You Sad? (coloring book on Depression for children 5-8): <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/14D.pdf>
 - Depression Monitoring Sheet: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhprograms/31D.pdf>

**Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.*