

CHILDHOOD DEPRESSION

Only in the past two decades has depression in children been taken seriously. Currently, it is estimated that about 3% to 5% of children and 5% to 10% of adolescents in the United States suffer from depression at any given time. The symptoms of depression in children vary. It is often undiagnosed and untreated because they are passed off as normal emotional and psychological changes that occur during growth. Another difficulty in diagnosing depression is that children often don't self-report being depressed. It is often the adults who observe and report that the child is not happy. Childhood depression was often referred to as "masked depression", where a child's depressed mood was evidenced by acting out or angry behavior. While this does occur, particularly in younger children, many children display sadness or low behavior. While this does occur, particularly in younger children, many children display sadness or low mood similar to adults who are depressed. Signs and symptoms of depression in children may include:

- Irritability or anger
- Continuous feelings of sadness
- Social withdrawal
- Increased sensitivity to rejection
- Changes in appetite – either increased or decreased
- Changes in sleep – sleeplessness or excessive sleep
- Vocal outbursts or crying
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue and low energy
- Physical complaints (e.g., stomachaches, headaches) that do not respond to treatment
- Reduced ability to function during events and activities at home or with friends, in school, extracurricular activities, and in other hobbies or interest.
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Extreme pessimism and indifference
- Impaired thinking or concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Thoughts of parents dying or fears of parents dying
- Threats/thoughts of running away
- Refusal to go to school
- Separation difficulties and clinging to a parent
- Older children may sulk, get into trouble at school, be negative, grouchy, and feel misunderstood.
- Older children may also begin using drugs or alcohol, especially if they are over the age of 12.

Not all children have all of these symptoms. In fact, most will display different symptoms at different times and in different settings. Although some children may continue to function reasonably well in structured environments, most kids with significant depression will suffer a noticeable decline in their ability to function in social activities, in school, and in other activities.