

# SHARE THE WELLNESS TIP



January 2, 2015

## Recognizing Depression in Children and Teens



While some think of childhood as a perfect time, painting it in rosy hues, children may feel shaken by developmental changes and outward events over which they have little or no control. Does your young child seem really down lately? Or maybe your teen's independent streak has become extreme and she just wants to be by herself all the time. In these cases, you're right to suspect that something is up. That something could be depression.

Depression isn't for adults alone. In fact, up to 8 percent of children are affected. And the number of children and teens in distress may be rising. Why? A stressful life event such as a family move, parents' divorce, or breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend may play a role. Depression also tends to run in families.

### How do depressed children act?

What are some clues that your child may suffer from more than a bad mood? Symptoms vary by age. A young child may be depressed if he or she:

- Won't go to school or fakes an illness
- Seems especially needy or clingy
- Is very worried that you may die

In teens, depression looks a little different. Your teenager could be depressed if she or he:

- Is no longer doing well in school
- Becomes grouchy
- Is using drugs or alcohol
- Wants to be alone most of the time
- Talks about death or suicide

Other general signs of depression in children of all ages include:

- Sadness or emptiness
- Pessimism
- Trouble thinking or making decisions
- Loss of interest in music, sports and other hobbies
- Lack of energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches or backaches

### You Can Get Through This Together

Most of the time, depressed youngsters need treatment that may include antidepressant medicine, counseling or both. As your child gets help, you can be a great source of support. Here's how:

- Acknowledge that this is a tough time. Be understanding and patient.
- Don't tell your child to cheer up. Instead, encourage him to share his feelings with you.
- Encourage your child to take his or her medicine as directed. Make sure he or she knows not to stop taking the medicine without the doctor's OK.
- Spend time with your youngster. Play a sport or share a favorite hobby, but don't push too much.
- Include your child in discussions with the doctor about treatment, using words he or she understands.

Sources: *National Institute of Mental Health, Harvard Health Publications*