

# DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN

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Depression has been called the common cold of psychopathology since it is so common in society today. Depression is a serious emotional disorder, which ranges in intensity from mild to severe. It is documented in the nation's mental health for the first time that approximately 7% suffer from a mental disorder such as depression and 7-17% of Americans will suffer from a major depressive episode at some point in their lifetime.

## Signs of depression in children include:

- Sadness and despair
- Loss of interest in life, activities or pleasure
- Loss of self esteem and self concept
- Eating and sleeping patterns are inconsistent
- Weight loss and loss of appetite
- Poor attention and concentration
- Negative outlook on life and future
- Poor grooming and hygiene
- Mood swings and irritability
- Interruptions in thoughts and behavior
- Slowed thought and movement
- Guilt and loss of hope
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Suicidal thoughts - 15% commit suicide
- Psychotic symptoms which impair awareness of reality



## What causes Depression?

1. **Biological or genetic vulnerability** - these involve multiple genes that interact with environmental influences, shape the nature of a person's brain chemistry such as emotional instability. Neurotransmitters, which cause brain chemicals, and serotonin, and norepinephrine, help rejuvenate moods and affect the central nervous system.
2. **Psychological Vulnerability** - involves behaviors shaped by factors of shyness and seeking excessive reassurance. Stressful life events such as losing a parent, physical or sexual abuse can cause depression and emotional trauma. Early trauma may damage or decrease nervous growth in the hippocampus in the brain, which is linked to mood disorders.
3. **Conjunctive Factors**- a person's general thoughts and beliefs about oneself, others and relationships that is pessimistic, which may lead to causes of depression. Children may also develop a pessimistic outlook on life, if certain unpleasant situations continue and do not change. This leads to social behaviors that cause others to reject them, confirming their world of loneliness and rejection, and leaving them feeling isolated and lonely.

## Why is Depression more common in women than in men?

*(Approximately 20% of women and 11% of men suffer from depression.)*

1. Women are more prone to developing helplessness, due to social factors and stressors which women have.

2. Standards of beauty and acceptance with images in media and dissatisfaction with their bodies, cause decreased self esteem, and increased guilt.
3. Women experience less economic power due to social expectations.
4. Women suffer higher rates of sexual and physical abuse.
5. Women undergo hormonal changes or suffering from hypothyroidism, which is a metabolic disorder that mimics depression.

### *Therapy can be highly beneficial:*

- Psychodynamic therapy focuses on historical events and developmental aspects of personality which influence depression.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy targets the relationship between a person’s internal thoughts, images, and belief systems and their behavior.
- Behavioral therapy focuses on the relationships of reinforcement and people’s behavior, especially social skills, with the lack of reinforcements for healthy behaviors impacting depressive symptoms.
- Interpersonal therapy uses a short-term therapeutic approach that focuses on how current events, social roles, and relationships play a role in depression.
- Group therapy allows feedback from the group that corrects cognitive distortions with diverse perspectives and solutions to support the individual with depression.

### *Activities that alleviate Depression*

- Focus on good nutrition, exercise, and regular sleep to create harmony and balance in your child’s life.
- Find out what gets your child excited and fuels them. Get your child involved in activities that inspire and motivate them.
- Support at all times is needed. Have a support group or people who are a positive influence surround your child.
- Praise, praise, and more praise for even the smallest accomplishments! Life gets easily overwhelming when depressed.
- Quality – not quantity – is the key. Make time spent with your child authentic and meaningful.
- Brainstorm with your child on logical and practical solutions to problems.
- Tap into their minds and hearts to bring them back to a happy and healthy lifestyle.

**A person’s first depressive episode may occur during childhood due to so many stressors at home, school and relationships in society today. It is crucial to provide support to your child and teach and develop stability in interpersonal relationships. Teach children, most importantly, to cope efficiently with stress to avoid episodes of depression. Create an environment of trust, acceptance and respect and provide a “safe place” for your child. It is important for your child to be able to express and to experience emotions with appropriate communication. These skill building techniques will impact your child’s daily, healthy functioning and create a stable future to avoid the chances of depression.**



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