

Children's Mental Health

Children and Depression

Clinical depression is one of the mental, emotional and behavioral disorders that can appear during childhood and adolescence. Depression in children can lead to school failure, alcohol or other drug use, and even suicide.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT CLINICAL DEPRESSION AND CHILDREN/ ADOLESCENTS

- ? As many as one in every 33 children may have depression (Center of MH Services, 1996)
- ? Up to 2.5% of children and up to 8.3% of adolescents in the U.S. suffer from depression (NIMH, 1999)
- ? Once a young person has experienced an episode of major depression, he or she is at risk of experiencing another episode of depression within the next five years
- ? Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have attention, learning or conduct disorders are at a higher risk for depression (Am Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: The Depressed Child, 1999)
- ? The rate of depression among adolescents is similar to that of depression in adults, and may be as high as one in eight
- ? Two-thirds of children with mental health problems do not get the help they need

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN/ ADOLESCENTS

Symptoms of child and adolescent depression vary both in severity and duration and may be different from those in adults. If you have questions about the possibility that your child may be depressed, please see a counselor to determine what treatment or medication may be needed.

Signs of depression may be:

- ? Missed school or poor school performance
- ? Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- ? Withdrawal from friends and activities once enjoyed
- ? Persistent sadness and hopelessness
- ? Problems with authority
- ? Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness
- ? Poor self-esteem or guilt
- ? Overreaction to criticism
- ? Frequent physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches
- ? Anger and rage
- ? Lack of enthusiasm, low energy or motivation
- ? Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- ? Thoughts of death or suicide

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN/ ADOLESCENTS

- ? The loss of love or attention, either by death or prolonged absence, from someone on whom a child is dependent for care and nurturing
- ? Depreciation and rejection of the child by a caretaker
- ? Genetic vulnerability
- ? An increased rate of depression is found in children of parents with bipolar disorder or who have been hospitalized for chronic physical illness
- ? Hospitalization, especially for a chronic illness