

Child and Adolescent Depression

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Today more than ever, children and adolescents are being diagnosed with depression. Our fast-paced society, time pressures, expectations from others, self-esteem and heredity all play a part in this disorder. It is difficult to know when children are depressed and when they are simply sad. With adolescents this is even more difficult because of the emotional, biological and developmental changes they are experiencing. Sometimes a stressful situation can spark behaviors that look like depression. At times we all feel “depressed” because our favorite sports team lost, because our best friend is mad at us, because a family member is ill or because a loved one has died. These are usually what are referred to as “situational depression” versus an innate biological depression.

A more serious form of what is clinically called “Major Depression” may occur without an obvious precipitating event. Children or teens may simply be sad, unhappy, or irritable without apparent reasons. The following are some of the common signs of clinical depression in children and teenagers:

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
- Significantly diminished interest in activities previously seen as pleasurable
- Significant change in appetite or significant weight gain/loss
- Problems with sleep: too much or not enough
- Moving and thinking more slowly than usual
- Daily fatigue or loss of energy
- Decreased ability to think or concentrate
- Thoughts or talk of death or suicide

If your child or adolescent is experiencing some or all of the above symptoms it would be wise to have them evaluated by a professional.