

Children and Adolescent Depression

Even though we have more medications available to treat depression and better-trained therapist, why is the percentage of depression in children and adolescents increasing?

Facts: According to the American Academy of Children and Adolescent Psychiatry's (www.aacap.org) press release on Today is National Depression Awareness Day (5/9/06), as many as 1 in 8 adolescents and 1 in 33 children have depression. The signs and symptoms or behaviors exhibited in a depressed child or adolescent can differ from adults. Knowing the signs and symptoms can help identify the depression at the onset and earlier intervention will increase the likelihood of successfully treating the symptoms and reducing the potential for worsening depression.

Common Stressor that Can Contribute to Depression in this Age Group:

- Traumatic events such as death of a loved one/pet
- Serious illness of the child or family member
- Abuse, neglect, abandonment and/or domestic violence
- Family conflict and/or divorce
- Learning and/or academic difficulties
- Being bullied

Signs and symptoms:

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, and/or crying
- Hopelessness
- Decreased interest in activities or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Persistent boredom, low energy/motivation
- Social isolation
- Poor communication
- Low self esteem and increased feeling of guilt
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility (may be more prevalent than sadness)
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequently complaints of physical illness such as headaches or stomach aches
- Frequently absences from school or poor performance in school
- Poor concentration, indecisiveness or forgetfulness
- Major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Self-injurious behavior
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self destructive behavior
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Seeking Help: If you believe a child you know could be suffering from depression, talk with a qualified mental health professional who can assess the needs of the child. You can also call the National Association for Mental Illness help line at 800-950-6264 or go to the web site at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>. Delaying or avoiding the treatment only increases the time the child will spend suffering and the potential risk of school problems, family conflicts, accidents, substance abuse, and in serious cases, suicide.