

Depression



What is depression ?

Depression happens when your child feels frequently sad (or hopeless, empty, or irritable) and/or loses interest in things they used to enjoy, in addition to other symptoms. Other symptoms can include changes in sleep habits, changes in weight, feeling restless or moving slower than usual, fatigue, feeling worthless or guilty, having difficulty focusing, and/or having thoughts of suicide.

While everyone gets sad from time to time, having depression means those sad feelings stick around for longer than expected and are harder to shake off. Those symptoms often make it harder to do daily activities like participate in school, have fun with friends, or other important things.



What does treatment look like?



Depression is very treatable. Treatment options for children and adolescents often include therapy, medication, or both.



Therapy for depression often uses **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**, which is a type of talking therapy that explores how our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all related.



A CBT therapist is often a mental health clinician (like a psychologist, social worker, or counselor). The therapist may meet with your child alone or with the parent present depending on the child's age. Treatment typically lasts several months with weekly sessions.



Another type of therapy is **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)**, which can be helpful for teenagers managing relational problems that led to depression.



Medication options typically include selective **serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)**. Medications take time to start to work and are typically taken every day. If your child is prescribed a medication, they should take it exactly as instructed by their doctor.

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What can I do?

FOR PARENTS:

- ✓ **Talk to your child** and **create opportunities for your** child to talk to you. Let them know you are there for them, you care for them, and you want to support them – no matter how they feel. Ask them what feels supportive right now. Keep chances for conversation open.
- ✓ Encourage your child's **positive coping skills**. Your child's hobbies (like journaling, art, music, physical activity, and others) can be good stress relievers.
- ✓ If your child expresses thoughts of suicide or harming themselves, **GET HELP IMMEDIATELY**.

FOR TEENS:

- ✓ **Stay engaged** with your friends and family, even if it feels hard right now. Reaching out for **support** can be a sign of strength.
- ✓ **Stay active** and try to do things that **could be fun, or do things you've enjoyed before**. While those activities may not feel quite the same right now, the more you do things you *might* like, the more opportunities you have for your mood to improve.
- ✓ Catch negative thoughts and try **re-thinking** them. **Ask yourself:** Would you say that thought to a friend? If not, what would you want to tell a friend in that situation? Can you tell yourself those things instead?
- ✓ **Change it up**. If you are feeling stuck, try doing something else. Even small changes (like getting outside, taking a walk, or talking to someone) can make a difference.



How do I get help?

If you or your loved one are having thoughts of suicide, are feeling depressed or stressed, or are having a crisis, **CALL OR TEXT 988 NOW** to connect to the national 988 Helpline.

If you need help, talk to your primary care provider or get support from a mental health provider. To find a mental health provider, call the phone number on the back of your child's insurance card and ask for a list of covered mental health providers in your area. You can also search for providers on your insurance company's website. For support finding resources for housing, food, and more, visit the [Children's National Hospital Community Resources website](#).

- ✓ Scan here for more information about how to find a mental health provider and how to get help in a crisis.



Pediatric **Health** Network

