



Is my child depressed?

Recognising the signs and practical tips

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Compiled by Priory for IAPS



Is my child depressed?

Growing up can be an emotional rollercoaster for young people. Youngsters can face many highs and lows during childhood, which can be related to lots of different things including school, friends and family. However, if you notice that your child seems to be experiencing more 'lows' than 'highs', with these occurring more frequently than expected, it may be that they are suffering from depression.

Depression doesn't just affect adults; it is becoming increasingly common in children. Recent studies suggest that nearly one in four young people will experience the symptoms of depression before they reach the age of 19.

It can be upsetting to watch your child struggle with persistent low moods and sadness. If you think your child may be depressed, it's important to know that you're not alone, and the most important first step is to seek help.

What is depression?

Whilst it's normal for everyone to feel sad on occasions, those suffering from depression experience intense and enduring low moods. These low moods can be so severe that they can prevent sufferers from experiencing pleasure and enjoyment, and impair their ability to function.

If left untreated, depression can result in a range of long-term problems and have a detrimental impact on an individual's quality of life.

Signs of depression in children

There are a number of symptoms of depression in children. If you notice any of the following in your child, it may be that they are struggling with depression:

Psychological symptoms:

- Persistent sadness, or low mood
- Anger and irritability
- Crying more than usual
- Poor concentration
- Indecisiveness
- Being highly sensitive to bad news or rejection
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Low self-esteem
- Feeling empty or numb
- Self-harming
- Suicidal thoughts
- Drugs or alcohol abuse

Social symptoms:

- Lacking interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Social withdrawal
- Poor school performance and behaviour

Physical symptoms:

- Frequent headaches and stomach aches
- Unexplained digestive problems
- Insomnia, or sleeping more than usual
- Eating more or less than usual
- Exhaustion
- Restlessness
- Lethargy

I think my child is depressed – what are the next steps?

If you think your child is showing signs of depression, you may find the following steps useful:

Talk to your child - it's important to try and find out how they are feeling and what is troubling them. If your child doesn't want to talk to you, encourage them to speak to someone else they trust. You could also contact your child's school to see if they have noticed any changes in your child's behaviour.

Be open and listen - if your child wants to talk to you about their problems, it's important to be open with them and listen to what they say. This lets your child know they're not alone and it's OK to talk about how they're feeling.

Take them seriously - if you have never experienced depression, it can be difficult to understand how your child is feeling. Something that doesn't seem to be an issue to you could be a major problem for your child, which is why it's important to take them seriously and avoid being critical or judgemental.

Learn the symptoms - not only will this will help you to empathise with your child, but will also mean that you are able to spot the warning signs.

Seek help - it's important to seek professional help if you think your child is depressed. This will ensure that your child receives the support they need, in order to prevent their depression from becoming worse. Make an appointment to see your GP; they will be able to recommend next steps.

IAPS is working in partnership with Priory to deliver a Teacher Conference on Mental Health 20th March.

For more details on the full range of Priory Services visit www.priorygroup.com, call **0800 086 1188** or [click here to make an enquiry](#).

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