



## CHILDREN AND DEPRESSION...WHEN TO GET HELP

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Feeling sad or "depressed" is a normal part of a child's daily life, especially when it follows an event that would be expected to make him/her feel blue. Most often, children regain control quickly and find ways to make things better. They cope with sadness by sharing feelings, putting the best possible spin on the problem, and using distraction thoughts and activities to temporarily put it out of mind. Some also use imagination to make things seem better until they actually improve. But what happens when the child can't control his/her feelings of sadness and the tricks for dealing with them don't seem to work? Or when he/she simply can't think about anything else? Or when he/she feels sad almost all of the time, even when there doesn't seem to be a good reason for the sadness? That is when he/she may have crossed the line from simply feeling depressed to actually being in a true "state of depression."

SYMPTOMS vary depending on age, personality and home situation. What to look for:

### General Behavior:

- Seems distracted and has trouble concentrating much of the time
- Is emotionally unstable...easy to anger and cries easily
- "Looks" sad much of the time
- Has difficulty finding activities that create happiness
- Frequently talks about sad thoughts and memories

### Eating:

- Refuses to eat or has loss of appetite
- Overeats in a compulsive way
- Has an obvious weight gain or loss

### Sleeping

- Exhibits attention-getting behaviors at bedtime
- Awakens more frequently during the night
- Develops sleep disturbances such as nightmares
- Has difficulty "getting going" in the morning
- Sleeps during the day without apparent need for extra sleep

### Peer Relationships

- Avoids or seems disinterested in being with friends
- Shows lack of interest in friend's activities
- Fights with friends over trivial matters

### School

- Has school avoidance or school phobias
- Shows uncharacteristic disinterest in schoolwork or after-school activities

### Home Life

- Loses interest in participating in home activities and conversations
- Avoids or excessively seeks parents' attention
- Has a change in relationship with siblings or extended family

**WHEN TO SEEK HELP:** A parent's intuition is usually the best guide for deciding when to seek help. A useful method for evaluating the severity of the situation is to divide your child's day into three components: 1) home life and interaction with family members, 2) school grades and studies, and 3) social contacts with friends. When the problem is in only one area, it is usually under fair control and counseling might be considered optional. Problems in two areas suggest that coping abilities are starting to fail, and professional help would be strongly recommended. And when all three areas are affected, there is little place to take refuge, and counseling should be considered mandatory.