

Helping Your Child with Depression

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



Depression is a medical condition that affects how a child feels, thinks, and acts. It is more than feeling sad for a short time. Children with depression may feel deep sadness, worry, or hopelessness that lasts and makes daily life hard. Depression can also cause loss of interest in things they used to enjoy. These symptoms can affect home, school, and friendships. It is more common when there is family history, stress, trauma, or big life changes. Common signs to watch for:

- Ongoing sadness or worry
- Irritability or anger
- Feeling worthless
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Low energy
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Eating more or less than usual
- Trouble paying attention
- Withdrawing from friends or family
- Changes in school performance or behaviors

When to Get Help

You should reach out to your child's primary care provider or a mental health specialist if:

- Symptoms last more than a couple weeks.
- Your child is struggling at home, school, or with friends.
- You notice big changes in sleep, eating, or behavior.
- Your child talks about feeling hopeless or not wanting to be here.

As a first step, talk with your child's primary care provider to review your concerns. Early help can reduce problems at home, in school, and with friendships.

Don't Forget Yourself

Your well-being matters.
Kids reflect adult stress.
Ask for help when needed.
Taking care of yourself is important—not selfish.

What Treatment May Look Like

Your child's primary care provider may screen for depression and talk to you about their symptoms. They will create a care plan that could include:

- **Therapy or Counseling.** A welcoming space for your child to talk with a professional who listens and helps. Skills learned in therapy can improve mood and reduce anxiety. Sometimes schools partner with agencies to provide therapy at school.
- **Medication.** For more serious symptoms, children may be prescribed medicine to help them feel better. Discuss with a provider before stopping or changing medication. It can take a few tries to find the right medication.
- **Therapy and Medication.** Sometimes using both together works best. Medicine can help make therapy more effective.



Strategies to Support Your Child

Caregivers play a big role in helping kids feel better. Simple daily habits at home can support a child's mood and make tough feelings easier to manage. A few habits at home can make a meaningful difference:

- **Sleep:** Children and teens need regular sleep to support mental health.
- **Physical Activity:** Daily movement can improve mood and reduce stress.
- **Healthy Eating:** Regular meals and healthy snacks help keep energy steady.
- **Limit Screen Time and Social Media:** Too much screen time can affect sleep and mood. Set clear limits.
- **School Communication.** Talk with your child's school about ways staff can support your child's mental health needs.

Depression can show up in kids in many ways. Some of the most common signs are sadness, low motivation, sleep changes, and feeling like a burden. Noticing these patterns early helps caregivers give support and comfort when children need it most.

Use these strategies to support your child based on their mood:

When Kids Feel Sad	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen and stay close. Let them know it's okay to feel sad.• Use calm words. Say things like "I'm here" or "you're not alone."• Keep routines steady. Regular meals, homework time, and bedtime help kids feel safe.• Do a small calming activity together. Try drawing, reading, or taking a short walk.
When Kids Feel Unmotivated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break tasks into tiny steps. One small step at a time feels easier.• Add movement. A quick stretch or walk can boost energy.• Praise effort. Say "I'm proud of you for trying."• Encourage more time away from screens. Consider reasonable screentime limits.
When Kids Have Changes in Sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep the same bedtime and wake time. This helps their body reset.• Make the room calm. Dark, quiet, and cool works best.• Limit screens before bed. Turn them off at least 1 hour before sleep.• Watch for big changes. If sleep problems last, talk with a doctor.
When Kids Feel Like a Burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell them they matter. Say "you are important to me."• Recognize their feelings. Let them share without judgment.• Point out their strengths. Name things they do well or kindly.• Spend time together. Even small moments help them feel loved.
When Kids Feel Angry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage them to take breaks to learn how to cope with their feelings.• Avoid arguments and power struggles while they are very upset.• Provide a safe space to talk through their feelings when they are ready.• Help them name and describe their feelings.

For More Information and Resources Visit:

<https://www.ohiomindsmatter.org/health-professionals/disorders-conditions/depression>

Call 988 for free, confidential support during a mental health or emotional crisis



References

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3. American Academy of Pediatrics. Managing Depression or Sadness: Tips for Families. In: Addressing Mental Health Concerns in Pediatrics: A Practical Resource Toolkit for Clinicians. 2nd ed. American Academy of Pediatrics; 2021. Accessed December 30, 2026. https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Family_ManagingDepression.pdf