



Children's Mental Health Matters!

Facts for Educators







Depression in Children and Adolescents

Definition

Students with symptoms of depression exhibit many behaviors that cause significant impairment in social or academic functioning. These symptoms include irritability, diminished interest in daily activities, social withdrawal, physical complaints, and declining school performance. The diagnostic criteria for major depression reflect the developmental differences between adults and children who suffer from the disorder.

Why do we care?

When compared to their developmental peers, students with depression:

-  Are less likely to participate in school activities.
-  Are more likely to disrupt classroom activities.
-  Often have at least one parent with depression.
-  Are more likely to commit suicide.
-  Are more likely to skip class and miss time away from school.
-  Are more likely to engage in risky behavior, such as substance abuse.

What can we do about it?

When a teacher sees any of these signs, it is important to first speak with the child's parents or caregivers. It is important to work in partnership with parents and mental health experts to develop an intervention plan as quickly as possible when these warning signs occur, because a quick response has been found to increase the probability of successful outcomes.

Effective ways of engaging parents include:

- Encouraging them to share their view about their child
- Asking them to express their concerns about their child's academic and behavioral performance

- Asking questions to determine that you have full information
- Discussing with parents the best ways (e.g. phone calls, notes) to communicate with them on a regular basis



Classroom strategies include:

- Become a more active observer of student behavior in and around the classroom.
- Consider different factors that may contribute to symptoms of depression. Look at each student on an individual, case-by-case basis.
- Inform caregivers and school clinicians about your observations of the student.
- Help other school staff members learn how to identify the symptoms of depression.
- Teach school staff how to respond to "cries for help" from students with depression.
- Create a feedback loop with caregivers and school clinicians to reassess student symptoms.
- Ask school clinicians to present on different treatment approaches for childhood depression.

Resources/Links

AACAP Facts for Families

The Depressed Child: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/depressd.htm>

Children and Grief: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/grief.htm>

Teen Suicide: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/suicide.htm>

Psychotherapies for Children and Adolescents: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/86.htm>

Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents How Medications are Used: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/psychmed.htm>

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Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents:: Types of Medications: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/29.htm>
Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents: Questions to Ask: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/medquest.htm>

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health – Depression Fact Sheet for the Classroom: http://www.macmh.org/publications/fact_sheets/Depression.pdf
National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2005). Family guide: What families should know about adolescent depression and treatment options. Retrieve December 7, 2005 from http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/CAAC/Family_Guide_final.pdf

National Association of School Psychologists
Depression in Children and Adolescents: Information for Families and Educators. <http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/social%20template.pdf>
Times of Tragedy: Preventing Suicide in Troubled Children and Youth, Part I: Tips for Parents and Schools http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicidept1_general.aspx
Times of Tragedy: Preventing Suicide in Troubled Children and Youth, Part II: Tips for School Personnel or Crisis Team Members http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicidept2_general.aspx
When it hurts to be a teenager. Principal Leadership Magazine, Cash, R. (2004). 4(2). http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/nassp_depression.aspx

**Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org March 2009**