

appropriate referrals are important nursing functions. Identification of a depressed child requires a careful history (health, growth and development, social and family health); interviews with the child; and observations by the nurse, parents, and teachers. If antidepressants are prescribed, the child and family need to know that antidepressants must be at a therapeutic level for 2 to 4 weeks to achieve a beneficial effect. The child and family also need to monitor the child for side effects of the specific drug prescribed and any interactions with other drugs.

Childhood Schizophrenia

Childhood schizophrenia refers to severe deviations in ego functioning and is generally reserved for psychotic disorders that appear in children younger than 15 years old. Childhood schizophrenia is a very rare illness among children in the general population; only about 2 in every 1000 with mental illness have childhood schizophrenia.

Childhood schizophrenia is characterized by symptoms that last at least 6 months and that seriously interfere with the child's functioning in school, at home, or in other social situations. The basic core disturbance is a lack of contact with reality and the subsequent development by the child of a world of his or her own. The most common manifestations are language disturbances, impaired interpersonal relationships, and inappropriate affect (outward expression of emotion). Treatment involves management of symptoms, prevention of relapse, and social and occupational rehabilitation of the young person. Antipsychotic drugs that may be used include haloperidol, clozapine, chlorpromazine, and risperidone. Family interventions and family therapy often result in improvements in psychotic symptoms, thought disorders, and social functioning among children with schizophrenia.

Nursing Care Management

Nursing of psychotic children is a highly specialized area. However, nurses should be alert to the possibility that schizophrenia can occur in children and refer children who consistently demonstrate abnormal behavior for evaluation. In addition, nurses need to teach family members of children taking antipsychotic drugs to observe for possible side effects. Common