

# Recognizing Depression in Children and Teens



Depression is a serious but treatable illness. In children and teens, it can sometimes be hard to recognize.



## What is depression?

Depression is a mood disorder. It affects the way you think and feel. It's a serious illness, just like diabetes and heart disease. And like those serious illnesses, depression is not something a person can just "snap out of." The most common symptom is a persistent feeling of deep sadness. People who are depressed may also feel hopeless, or that life isn't worth living. At times, depression may lead to thoughts of suicide or death.

## Depression in children

Children as young as age 6 may have feelings of deep sadness. But they can't always express the way they feel. Instead, your child may:

- Eat more or less than normal
- Sleep more or less than normal
- Seem unable to have fun
- Think or speak about suicide or death
- Seem fearful or anxious

- Act in an aggressive way
- Use alcohol, illegal drugs, or medicines not prescribed to them
- Complain of stomachaches or other pains that can't be explained

## Depression in teens

It can be hard to spot depression in teens. It's normal for them to have big mood swings. This is the result of changing hormones. It's also part of growing up. But if your teen is always depressed, concern is appropriate. Signs of depression include:

- Using drugs or alcohol
- Problems in school and at home
- Frequent episodes of running away
- Thoughts or talk of death or suicide
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Problems with eating or sleeping
- Low self-esteem
- Hostile behavior or rage
- Loss of pleasure in life
- Not caring about activities once enjoyed

## What you can do

Treatment can help depressed children and teens. Talk with your child's healthcare provider or school counselor or psychologist. Or check with your local mental health center, social service agency, or hospital. Assure your child or teen that their pain can be eased. Pay close attention to your child's social media postings. Watch for red flags, such as comments about self-harm, harming others, weapons, or alcohol or drug use. Watch for behavior changes that concern you. Offer your love and support. If your child or teen talks about death or suicide, get help now.

## Call 988

If your child is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, call or text 988. Do not leave your child alone. When you call or text 988, you will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

## To learn more

- [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness at www.nami.org](https://www.nami.org) or 800-950-6264
- [National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov) or 866-615-6464
- [Mental Health America at www.mentalhealthamerica.net](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net) or 800-969-6642

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