



## HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION

Childhood depression is more common than many people realize. Nearly one in 10 children or teens have experiences of depression: long-lasting sadness, irritability, or hopelessness that interfere with their day-to-day life in a significant way.

Depression is manageable with the right treatment and support.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255, 24/7/365

Crisis Text Line: Text Got5 to 741741, 24/7/365

Let this guide offer you tips to better understand the behaviors related to depression. This is not a substitute for professional help, but we hope it helps you best support your child at home.

- 1. Talk about it.** Have open conversations about depression with your family and child. Think about your child's age and developmental level to explain depression in a way they can understand.
  - Younger children tend to be very self-involved in how they see the world around them. They may think that having depression is their fault. Help them understand that depression is a disease—just like heart disease or diabetes. It's not anyone's fault, and it's not something to be ashamed of.
  - Teenagers tend to think what's happening in the moment will always be the way things are. They may think that their depression will never go away and they will never feel better. Help them to understand that depression is treatable and does in fact get better.
  - Ask children of all ages if they have questions about depression and let them know there are other kids who have the same kind of feelings.
  - Brothers and sisters often worry when a sibling has depression. Make sure to talk with everyone in your family about depression and changes they may see in their depressed sibling. Talking about it and answering questions will help to ease their worries.
  - Make it part of your normal family routine to talk about all kinds of feelings, both positive or negative – even feelings they think you wouldn't be comfortable hearing, like thoughts of suicide. By making it part of a routine to talk about all kinds of feelings, your child is more likely to come to you when they are struggling with something.
  - If you or a family member has experienced bipolar disorder and had a positive treatment outcome, this can be helpful to share with your child. Remember to keep the focus on your child and what they are going through. Knowing about someone who has also experienced bipolar disorder – whether a family member or a celebrity – may help some children to know that they can get better.
- 2. Promote exercise as a family.** Even short periods of exercise can be helpful for children with depression. Start with small tasks such as walking to the store or walking the dog, and build up from there. As your child starts feeling better, their activity level will become part of their regular routine.

- 3. Make sleep a priority for your child.** Getting enough sleep is very important for recovery from depression. If your child has poor sleep patterns, it could also be a symptom of their depression- so it's important to be patient and give things time to even out. You can help by encouraging regular bedtimes and waking times.
- 4. Support positive self-esteem.** Many children with depression may feel bad about themselves. Lack of self-esteem is a common symptom of depression. Use praise freely but sincerely. Children who struggle with depression will benefit from encouragement.
- 5. Involve your child's school.** Many parents worry that sharing their child's diagnosis of depression with the school will stigmatize their child. But schools can help provide the best resources and accommodations. Let the school know about your child's depression and brainstorm with teachers and other school officials. Working together can keep your child engaged in school during an episode of depression, which can improve self-esteem and academic performance.
- 6. Encourage socialization.** Children with depression often feel isolated and don't want to reach out to others about what they are experiencing. Even if your child is usually outgoing, depression may make them want to stay at home and not interact with others. Plan social events that include your child.
  - For younger children, try to arrange shorter play dates. Limiting the time helps your child from becoming overwhelmed.
  - For older children, encourage them to join a club or another school activity they enjoy. This can help to foster social interactions if the teen is able to motivate him or herself enough to attend.Research together a support group for youth with depression in your area.
- 7. Talk about medication.** Depression is often treated with a combination of medications and therapy. Ask your child if they have questions about any medications to be taken. Learn about the medications together. Talk about the possible side effects too. This will help your child to understand what to expect and it may help them better explain their depression and treatment to friends.
- 8. Take care of yourself.** It can be overwhelming to support a child with depression. You are a great parent for learning how to help. Remember, all parents need a break. It's important to find time to take care of yourself. Use the activities and supports that will help you to recharge your batteries.
- 9. You are not alone.** Just as your child is not alone in this, neither are you. Look for a [support group in your area](#) to connect with other parents/caregivers who are experiencing similar situations with their children.

Depression is treatable. It helps to stay open and honest about emotions within your family. Stay connected to your child's primary care doctor and make sure your child feels comfortable being open with them, too.

Need more information on Pediatric Depression, including signs and symptoms?

<http://bit.ly/PTEACH-Family>

Interested in learning more about the different treatment methods for childhood depression?

<http://bitly.com/OMH-TeenDepression>

*Special thanks to the Project TEACH Parent Advisor Group, who helped to develop this handout.*