



## **For Parents: Depression and How to Help**

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Depression is a medical illness that involves feelings of overwhelming sadness and a loss of interest in daily activities. It is normal for children to experience changes in mood from day to day. When your child's mood does not recover and you begin to see them pulling away from previously enjoyed activities, this could mean they are experiencing depression.

### **What are some signs of depression?**

- Withdrawal from friends, family, and school
- Feeling hopeless
- Change in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Physical pain
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Missing school
- Declining grades
- Drug or alcohol use
- Irritability
- Feeling worthless or helpless
- Lack of motivation to engage in preferred activities

### **What can our family do?**

- Encourage engagement in social and physical activities
- Engage in activities with your child
- Engage in active listening and avoid lecturing or passing judgement
- If things do not improve or seem to worsen, seek out a mental health professional

### **What to do if you are worried about suicide**

#### **Signs to watch out for:**

- Comments or talk of suicide, death, or dying
- Saying things like "it would be better off if I were not here"
- Engaging in reckless or high-risk behavior (e.g., drug use)
- Giving away valued possessions
- Withdrawing from regular activities and spending time alone

### **How can I support my child?**

- Ask your teen directly about suicide
- Talk to them about their thoughts and feelings
- Let them know that you are not disappointed

- Participate in activities with your teen to help keep them active
- Encourage them to stay busy
- Encourage social interaction with friends and family
- Increase monitoring if necessary
- If you have guns in your home, ensure all ammunition is locked and inaccessible
- Put alarms and locks on patio doors and second floor windows if necessary

### **When should we seek emergency help?**

- If you do not feel you can keep your child safe, call 911 immediately or bring them to the emergency room
- **You should seek help if your child:**
  - Has a specific suicide plan
  - Has more than just thoughts of suicide and states they intend to go through with it at some future point in time
  - Hides or refuses to give up weapons/means

### **Websites for more information:**

- Information about supporting others with depression from University of Michigan Depression Center: <https://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit/i-want-support-someone/supporting-others>
- Parent's Guide to Teen Depression: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression.htm?pdf=13027>
- For more information on depression or teen depression visit <http://www.careguides.med.umich.edu> and search "depression".

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