

## Counselling and support

Many children start with counselling like cognitive-behavioural therapy (or 'CBT'). CBT teaches people how their thoughts, feelings, and actions work together. It also teaches skills such as healthy thinking, problem solving, and stress management. CBT has been widely adapted for different groups and different situations, and it's also useful to prevent depression.

Self-care strategies to stay well are important for everyone. This includes eating well, exercising, spending time with others, and making time for fun activities. Ask your care team for ideas. They can also recommend programs or services in your community that support healthy living.

Support groups may also be helpful. Support groups are an opportunity to share experiences and learn from others. There are also groups specifically for caregivers and family members.

## Medication

Your child may also be prescribed an antidepressant if other options don't seem to help. This is a group of medications used to treat depression and other mental illnesses. The decision to use medication can be complicated, especially if your child is young. Medications can be helpful for some children, but there may be extra risks to consider. It's important to have an honest discussion with your doctor so you know what to expect. Most professionals will consider medication for children under the age of 18 as a second option to other approaches, like counselling.

## HOW CAN I HELP THE ENTIRE FAMILY?

It is important to recognize your own feelings about your child's depression. Many people feel guilty or frustrated when a loved one is diagnosed with a mental illness, and this can affect family relationships. It can also be difficult to cope with your child's unhappy feelings.

Many of the strategies that help your child can help the entire family. Family counselling can give everyone an opportunity to share their experiences and help you develop strategies that take care of the entire family's well-being. Support groups can connect you with other caregivers who are supporting a loved one. And, of course, wellness strategies at home are helpful for everyone.

It's best to be honest with siblings and other family members about a child's illness. That way, your child has several sources of support and understanding.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today**

# CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND DEPRESSION



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While we may think of low mood or other challenges as adult problems, they can affect people at any age. Children and teens can experience mental illnesses like depression. Sometimes it can be difficult for adults to understand how difficult children's problems can be because we look at their problems through adult eyes. But the pressures of growing up can be very hard for some children. It's important that we remind ourselves that while their problems may seem unimportant to us, they can feel overwhelming to young people. It's important to take depression in young people seriously.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a type of mental illness called a mood disorder. Mood disorders affect the way you feel, which also affects the way you think and act. With depression, you may feel 'down,' hopeless, or find that you can't enjoy things you used to like. Many people who experience depression feel irritable or angry. And some people say that they feel 'numb' all the time.

Recognizing depression in young people can be more difficult than recognizing depression in adults because young people experience so many changes. You may wonder what is 'normal' and what might be a problem. Also, many children and teens may not want to talk about their feelings, or may have their own explanation for their experiences. However, you may still notice the following changes.

- **Changes in feelings:** Your child may show signs of being unhappy, worried, guilty, angry, fearful, helpless, hopeless, lonely, or rejected.

- **Changes in physical health:** Your child may start to complain of headaches or general aches and pains that you can't explain. They may feel tired all the time or have problems eating or sleeping. Your child may unexpectedly gain or lose weight.
- **Changes in thinking:** Your child may say things that indicate low self-esteem, self-dislike or self-blame—for example, they may only talk about themselves negatively. They may have a hard time concentrating. In some cases, they may show signs that they're thinking about suicide.
- **Changes in behaviour:** Your child might withdraw from others, cry easily, or show less interest in sports, games, or other fun activities that they normally enjoy. They might over-react and have sudden outbursts of anger or tears over small incidents.

Some of these changes may be signs of mental health problems other than depression. It's important to look at the bigger picture: how intense the changes are, how they impact your child's life, and how long they last. It's particularly important to talk to your child if you've noticed several changes lasting more than two weeks.

## WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Depression often starts between the ages of 15 and 30, but it can affect anyone—even teens and younger children. While we don't know exactly what causes depression, many factors are likely at play. These include family history, personality, life events, and changes in your child's body. Certain medications and physical illnesses can also contribute to depression.



## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Depression is very treatable. Children, teens, and adults can all recover from depression. For children and teens in particular, early treatment is important so they can get back to their education and other goals as quickly as possible.

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Support for a young person who experiences depression may come from several different people and places. Your family doctor is often the first place you start, but you may also find support through people like psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, or peer support workers. Many communities offer programs that support healthy children and build social connections—these are also helpful in preventing depression.

Schools are also an important place for all children. Many schools offer programs that build skills, resiliency, and supports. If you're concerned about your child's health, teachers and school counsellors can describe changes they've seen or problems they've noticed during the school day. If your child is diagnosed with a mental illness, your child's school may make small changes to support your child's learning goals. Many schools offer counselling or referrals to community services.