

Depression: Get Help

Depression is a serious medical disorder that cannot be willed away or ignored. Fortunately, depression is highly treatable and manageable.

The earlier you identify and treat symptoms of depression, the faster you interrupt the advancement of severe depression and help your child feel better and thrive again. If you, as a parent or caregiver, are experiencing symptoms of depression, it is just as important that you prioritize getting help for yourself as you would getting help for your child.

Diagnosis

Depression should not be self-diagnosed. If you suspect your child is depressed, the first step is to confirm your suspicions.

One step you can take is to talk to your child's primary care provider about getting a comprehensive medical physical to rule out any underlying medical condition that may cause depression. Your child's pediatrician will then review your family history and do a mental health assessment to determine when depression symptoms began, how long they last, how often they occur, and if they keep your child from doing their usual activities.

Depending on the results, the doctor may then refer your child to a mental health professional, who will try to understand your child's thoughts and feelings, look for stressors, and identify situations that may be significantly contributing to your child's depression. After that, they will develop a treatment plan that works best for your child and family. You should also partner with your child's teacher and school to better understand what they're seeing.

You can learn about the different types of mental health professionals [here](#). Remember, you are your child's biggest advocate! Partner with your doctor to find the treatment that is right for your child.

Treatment

While some forms of depression are shorter term or tied to a specific situation, many forms of depression require that people learn to live with and manage it long term. For children who experience depression, talk therapy treatments like play therapy, behavioral therapy, family therapy and individual therapy can help significantly. Medication is also highly effective and is considered safe if properly prescribed and monitored. A combination of therapy and medication is believed to be the most effective treatment.

The beginning of treatment can be overwhelming and frustrating. It takes time, effort and often more than one attempt to find an affordable, qualified mental health professional who not only treats depression but is also the right fit for your family. Additionally, finding the right medication type and dosage can take some trial and error, and once medication begins there can be some difficult initial side effects as the body adjusts. Once the proper course is confirmed, it can take at least four weeks to feel the full benefits.

Once the treatment benefits kick in and people start to feel better, many assume treatment is no longer needed so they scale back or stop completely. **This assumption is not only untrue, but also dangerous.** Yes, depression treatment eases the symptoms, which helps you feel better; however, it also allows you to maintain your mental well-being by giving you a consistent outlet for working through your depression and/or medication to keep brain chemicals balanced. Cutting these things off suddenly or inconsistently can trigger difficult withdrawal symptoms and significantly worsen chemical imbalances and depression, which could lead to suicide. It is therefore crucial to stick with the treatment plan exactly as it was prescribed by the doctor and, if you believe a change is needed, work with your doctor to implement that change.

Partnering with Your School

Schools should be included in the larger treatment plan. Your child spends most of their time at school. It is where they learn, form friendships, and experience many things. When children have trouble concentrating or miss a lot of school because they are not feeling well, academic performance, friendships and emotional well-being suffer.

Teachers, nurses, school counselors or school psychologists are often the first to notice changes in your child, observe symptoms of depression or know if something hard is happening to them at school. They can work with you and your child to develop individualized plans to manage their learning and schoolwork, help your child put identified coping strategies into practice, provide in-house counseling services, administer medication, and recommend other community organizations that provide peer support, services and education. They can also look for signs of worsening or improving depression symptoms and notify you of any changes. Check with your PTA to see if they can help connect you to school supports and community resources.

It's important to note that there are certain behaviors that may legally require the school to take action. For example, if a child has suicidal thoughts, the school must require that a child gets a psychiatric evaluation before they can return to school.

If your child is having the urge to hurt themselves, immediately call 911 or take them to the nearest Emergency Room.