

DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

When a child or youth is depressed, support from their family is very important. Family members can help by making sure the young people have opportunities to make positive changes and choices. They can also watch for improvements, reward positive behaviour, and give lots of reassurance.

Parents can help a child or teen by encouraging them to:

Follow Normal Routines

Children and youth who are depressed often postpone activities and withdraw from friends and social situations. They may stay up too late and sleep too much.

- Help your child or teen get into normal routines.
- Make sure they get lots of physical exercise. Even if they say they don't feel like it, exercise will help them feel better.

Set Goals

Depression may cause children and youth to give up on their goals.

- Talk to your child or teen and help them to list some personal goals. Then break these goals down into small tasks they can do each day. This will give them a sense of accomplishment.

Act with Confidence

Depressed children and youth may seem passive and emotionless. They may feel that they have no control over their lives.

- Help your child or teen to become more assertive and take responsibility for daily activities. For example, encourage them to start conversations and organize a daily schedule.

Think Positively

Depression causes children and youth to think negatively about themselves and others. Parents can help them to recognize and avoid these negative thoughts.

- Boost your child's or teen's self esteem. Help them to see their strengths.
- Teach them to focus on daily goals and achievements rather than negative thoughts.

Increase Socialization

Depressed children and youth withdraw and lose contact with friends and family.

- Encourage them to spend time with their friends.
- Keep the children and youth busy. Make sure they don't spend too much time alone. Try to get them to take initiative and set up social activities themselves.

Cope with Physical Symptoms of Depression

Depression causes physical symptoms like tiredness. Children and youth may use these symptoms as excuses to avoid tasks and activities.

- Help children and youth understand that these symptoms are temporary and harmless.
- Teach them to cope by not allowing the symptoms of depression to interfere with activities.