

How is depression treated?

The best treatment for depression is a combination of therapy and medication.

The most common and effective medications used to treat depression are a form of antidepressant called SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). They increase the amount of a chemical in the brain called serotonin, which affects moods. Medication may take several weeks to become effective. And if one antidepressant doesn't help your child, a different one may.

The types of therapy most commonly used to treat children with depression are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy (IPT), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT).

- **CBT** teaches kids how their thoughts shape their feelings and behaviors. The therapist will also encourage them to return to activities they've enjoyed in the past.
- In **IPT**, your child will talk with a therapist about their relationships with friends and family. They learn how these relationships can affect their mood.
- **DBT** combines CBT with mindfulness skills. It can help teenagers with depression learn to tolerate and manage overwhelming emotions.

Treatment for depression is not one-size-fits-all, and finding the right approach might take some time. But with support and patience, kids with depression can feel much better and get back to enjoying life.

If you are concerned a child may be suicidal, don't wait. Get help now.

If you think your child might be having suicidal thoughts, it's very important to talk to them about how they're feeling. Talking about it directly makes them less likely to attempt suicide.

If you think they might be at risk of attempting suicide, take immediate action. You can call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-8255**, call **911**, or take them to the emergency room.



For more resources on Depression in English and Spanish, visit the Child Mind Institute's Family Resource Center at childmind.org/resources

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We're here to provide clear, accurate information to help you feel confident, comfortable and empowered when it comes making decisions about your child's mental health.



Depression in Kids: Quick Facts

Symptoms of depression and tips for supporting children and teenagers with depression



Child Mind
Institute

What is depression?

Depression is a mental health condition that can cause children and teenagers to feel very sad and hopeless. Kids with depression may feel down all the time, have trouble enjoying things they used to love, and have low energy. In some kids, depression looks more like anger than sadness. They might be very irritable and get mad easily.

It's normal for children to feel sad or angry when bad things happen, but a child with depression doesn't feel better if things get better. Kids with depression might think about or attempt suicide.



What are the symptoms of depression?

The biggest sign that a child might be depressed is a change in their mood. For example, a normally happy kid who suddenly seems sad or angry, or a teen who's usually a whirlwind of activity but who now can't seem to get excited about anything.

Signs that a kid might be depressed include:

- Getting angry or irritated easily
- Hopelessness ("What's the point of even trying?")
- Lacking energy or seeming lazy
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble making decisions
- Struggling in school
- Low self-esteem or saying negative things about themselves ("I'm just terrible at everything.")
- Avoiding friends
- Eating too little or too much
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Exhaustion
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Thinking about or attempting suicide

Some kids have severe symptoms that last between two weeks and several months (that's called major depressive disorder). Some have less severe symptoms that last for a year or more (that's called persistent depressive disorder or dysthymia).



Who can have depression?

Depression usually begins during the teenage years, but younger kids can also have depression. Girls are diagnosed twice as often as boys.

How is depression diagnosed?

Depression is diagnosed by a medical or mental health professional, like a pediatrician, psychologist or psychiatrist. To make the diagnosis, the clinician will talk with you and your child. Your child may be asked to take a test called an inventory to help the doctor understand more about what they have been experiencing. The clinician will also try to determine if your child's symptoms could have a different cause, such as substance use, another psychiatric disorder or a medical cause.