

# Information on Depressive Disorder for Professionals:

## What is depression?

It is normal for children and youth to feel sad from time to time. But this sadness doesn't stop them from going on with their everyday activities. And it goes away on its own. Depression, on the other hand, is sadness so severe that it interferes with everyday life.

## Typical symptoms of depression:

- Feeling sad, worried, irritable or angry
- Lack of enjoyment in life, or troubles enjoying anything
- Feeling hopeless and worthless
- Having troubles coping with everyday activities at home, school, or work
- Problems with sleep, energy, appetite and concentration

With severe depression, a person may even hear voices, or have thoughts of harming themselves or others. Depression is more than normal sadness. A depressed person can't 'just snap out of it'. Studies even show actual, physical changes in a person's brain when they have a clinical depression.

## How common is depression?

Depression is common. Researchers believe that about 1 in 5 children and youth will go through a depression by the time they turn 18. Studies also tell us that at any one moment, between 4 and 8 out of every 100 children and youth are having a major depression. Sadly, most people with depression do not get help. But getting help is important, because there are effective treatments, and early treatment can stop it from coming back in the future (AACAP, 2007).

## What causes depression?

Sometimes parents feel guilty that they caused their child's depression. There is usually not one single cause, but rather a combination of different things going on at the same time:

- **Family history:** If parents or other members of your family have had depression or other emotional problems, there is a bigger chance that your child or teen may have depression.
- **Stress:** Children and youth can get very upset by...
  - Conflicts between parents, and any brothers/sisters
  - Parents coping with stress or depression
  - Parent's separation or divorce
  - Bullying

- Conflicts or stresses with friends or classmates
- Not doing well in school or feeling too much pressure to do well in school

It can be hard for adults to see things from a child or teen's point of view. Things that might not seem to be a big deal to an adult can be overwhelming to a child or youth. And some children are just more sensitive to stress.

### **What should we do if we think a child is depressed?**

- If a child had a broken arm and was in pain, you'd take her to a doctor, right? Instead of causing pain on the outside, depression causes pain on the inside. But you still need to help a child with this pain. If you think the child might be depressed, start by suggesting they are taken him to a doctor (like your family doctor or pediatrician), and describe the changes you're noticing in his behaviour and feelings. The doctor can check for medical problems that might be causing the depression. The doctor may suggest mental health services, and can help you link with psychologists, psychiatrists or social workers.

### **If you suspect depression:**

If you suspect that a child/youth has depression, suggest to have him/her seen by a doctor (such as a family physician or pediatrician) to make sure there aren't any medical problems (such as hormone imbalances) that might be causing or contributing to the depression. The doctor may recommend more specialized mental health services, or help with referrals to mental health professionals such as a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker.

\* If you are concerned that a child may be having thoughts of suicide, then consider contacting a crisis line and/or a local hospital emergency room.

### **Treatment for Depression:**

Many different treatments are available for depression. They can be used alone or together, depending on the child. Some treatments work well with some children, but not with others. If a treatment isn't working (after giving it a good try, of course), a mental health professional may talk with the family and child about trying something else.

#### ***“Talk Therapy” or Psychotherapy***

There are different types of talk therapy, which include (but are not limited to):

- **Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)**: Helps individuals cope with depression by focusing on changing their thoughts and behaviours. In depression, individuals tend to have negative, depressive thoughts. In CBT, individuals learn to replace depressive thoughts with more positive, helpful thoughts.
- **Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT)**: Helps with depression by focusing on improving relationships. Regardless of how the depression started, individuals with depression

tend to have tension in their relationships from either 1) conflict or withdrawal, or 2) life transitions or changes. IPT helps improve these difficulties.

- **Solution-focused therapy:** Helps by finding solutions. In depression, individuals tend to focus on life stresses and problems. In solution-focused therapy, individuals get support in finding solutions to these difficulties.

## **Medications:**

May be helpful in certain cases, and these may be prescribed by a family physician, pediatrician or psychiatrist. Medications are generally used only when other treatments have not been successful, or when the depression is so severe that other treatments are not possible.

There have been concerns about the safety of antidepressant medications in children and youth. Current research shows that when used in the right way and monitored by a physician, antidepressants are safe and effective (Bridge, 2007). Like prescription eyeglasses, medications must be chosen and adjusted for each child or youth.

Some people have strong views about medications - a balanced look at antidepressant treatment is the most helpful. Medications are not all bad, but they are not needed all the time either.

## **Outpatient and Inpatient Services:**

Services for depression may be provided as an “outpatient”, whereby the patient sees a mental health professional at a community agency, or a hospital clinic. For more severe depression, more intensive support and services are generally offered by hospitals such as an inpatient program.

## **Useful Websites:**

<http://knowledge.ca/program/beyond-the-blues-child-and-youth-depression>

<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/mental-health/disorders/depression>

<http://www.bcguidelines.ca/pdf/depressyouth.pdf>

<http://www.about-teen-depression.com/teen-depression.html>