



Feeling 'Blue'

At this time of year, we often hear people talking about having the 'winter blues', feeling kind of 'down' and not having much energy. Weather, less sunlight, and being inside a lot can contribute to these feelings. However, the 'winter blues', which usually improve as spring approaches, are quite different from the more intense feelings associated with depression.

Like adults, children and adolescents can also become depressed. It is important to understand the difference between having depressed feelings and having a persistent depressed mood. Generally, depressed feelings are temporary. They are natural responses to experiences in which a child may feel a sense of loss or disappointment. Often a reaction to situations such as failing an exam, losing a game, ending an important relationship, or being overly judged and criticized can cause depressed feelings.

Usually, with time, these feelings resolve themselves. However, if these feelings are ignored or go unresolved, they can develop into a depressed mood. A depressed mood can also develop suddenly if the child or adolescent experiences a major life crisis that causes significant stress. If this depressed mood continues without intervention, an illness called clinical depression can develop.

Various factors contribute to a child's risk of becoming depressed, including personality type, lack of external support systems, learning difficulties, and/or the nature of the stressful event. Symptoms in children and adolescents which can signal depression usually consist of a combination of the following:

- Persistent, constant sadness
- Inability to enjoy a favorite activity
- Increased irritability, aggression, or acting out behaviors
- Persistent complaints of physical problems such as stomach aches or headaches
- Decrease in school attendance and academic performance



- Lack of concentration and seeming to be bored all the time
- Major changes in sleep and/or eating habits that do not improve
- Withdrawal from friends or interpersonal difficulties
- Negative self statements and/or feelings of insecurity
- Adolescents may abuse alcohol or drugs and engage in self destructive behaviors

Depression can also run in families. While it is important to not over react to daily or even weekly changes in your child's mood, if a combination of symptoms described above does not change, then we encourage parents or guardians to seek help from a doctor or psychologist. Generally, the best intervention and treatment of depression consists of medical and psychological treatment.

We encourage parents and guardians to contact us if they suspect that their child may be depressed as we are able to help with the referral process. Communication between home and school is important in terms of intervening with depressed children. We have found that children generally do better when doctors and counselors working with the child and the family communicate with school personnel so that everyone is on the same page and doing what is best for the child. We are always here to help, so please do not hesitate to call.



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