



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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Childhood Depression Fact Sheet

One in every 33 children may have clinical depression at any given time. Shockingly, up to 66% of these young people are not getting any help for their condition, despite the fact that depression is a leading cause of suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds and the sixth leading cause of death for 5-15 year olds. Substance abuse and addiction often manifest as depression, bipolar disorder, etc.

When depression emerges early in life, it often persists, recurs and continues into adulthood and may predict severe illness in adult life. In children it can lead to school failure, alcohol or other drug use, and even suicide. To prevent damage to a young person's academic, social, emotional, and behavioral functioning, it is imperative that their depression be diagnosed and treated early.

Symptoms of Depression in Children/Adolescents

Symptoms of child and adolescent depression vary in severity and duration and may be different from those in adults. Warning signs and symptoms may include:

- Missed school or poor school performance.
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Withdrawal from friends and activities once enjoyed.
- Persistent sadness and hopelessness.
- Problems with authority.
- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness.
- Poor self-esteem or guilt.
- Overreaction to criticism.
- Frequent physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches.
- Anger and rage.
- Lack of enthusiasm, low energy or motivation.
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Rapid mood swings between silliness and irritability or rages. [Symptoms resemble those of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).]

Possible Causes of Depression in Children/Adolescents

Depression seems to have a genetic component. However, certain life events, traumatic experiences, or troubling relationships can trigger depression, such as:

- The loss of love or attention, either by death or prolonged absence, from someone on whom a child is dependent for care and nurturing.
- Disapproval or rejection by a caretaker.
- Having a parent with bipolar disorder or one who has been hospitalized for substance abuse or chronic physical illness.
- Poor academic performance.
- Being bullied by peers.
- Questioning one's sexuality and feeling "different" or unaccepted.

Complicating Factors

To avoid feelings of depression, teens may experiment with drugs or alcohol, become sexually promiscuous, or exhibit aggressive or risk-taking behavior. Other factors that can cause or exacerbate depression include biological and physical changes associated with puberty and pressures common in adolescence. Young people who are depressed and exhibit additional symptoms, such as insomnia, panic attacks and delusions or hallucinations, are at particular risk for suicide.

What Parents/Adults/Family Can Do

Parents and family members are usually the first to notice symptoms. If they suspect depression, they should seek help from a trained mental health professional. Early identification, diagnosis, and treatment are critical.

- Seek help from a mental health professional that specializes in children and adolescents, or the child's doctor.
- Be alert to behaviors of concern, note how long and how often the behaviors occur and how severe they seem, and seek help.

Learn more about depression and bipolar disorder and seek support from other families.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.