



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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Antidepressant Medication and Children: Tips for Parents

To help parents better understand and make decisions about the use of SSRI antidepressant medication for their children, the Mental Health America has prepared this fact sheet.

Childhood depression is a very serious health problem that affects one in 8 adolescents and one in 33 children. Left untreated, depression can lead to significant problems at home, in school and with peers –as well as to life-threatening problems such as substance abuse and suicide. The good news is that depression in children is very treatable, with psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of the two. In October, 2004 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ordered that SSRIs prescribed for children carry a “black box” label the strongest warning the agency puts forth regarding the potential risk for suicide.

In light of this warning, MHA offers the following tips for parents on how best to approach their child’s care.

- Seek help if your child shows signs of depression or other mental health problems. Discuss all available treatment options with your child’s doctor, and carefully weigh all the risks and benefits associated with each treatment. (If your child is already being treated, express any concerns that you have to your child’s doctor.)
- If your child is prescribed an antidepressant medication, watch him or her closely and make sure s/he receives a thorough evaluation, continual follow-up and careful monitoring – particularly in the first several weeks – by a qualified doctor.
- Educate yourself about the warning signs of suicide and act quickly if you are concerned. Many people are afraid to discuss the issue of suicide for fear of “planting” the idea, but it is actually better to be open and direct.
- If your child is taking an antidepressant, do not abruptly discontinue use. Doing so can lead to significant side effects.
- Separate “fact from fiction” by using credible sources with information based on sound medical science rather than rumor or opinion. Beware of extreme claims, such as antidepressants are “always dangerous” or “never effective.” Medical research has demonstrated that such statements are misleading and dangerous.
- Remember that the worst possible situation for a child with a mental health problem is to go without any treatment at all.

Additional information for parents and families concerned about the use of medication in treating depression in children and adolescents is available at www.parentsmedguide.org.

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.