

# Children's Health

## Childhood Depression Is Real—But Children Needn't Suffer

(NAPSA)—Recent research may help brighten a lot of young lives. Just like adults, children suffer from depression, but only in the last several years have parents and caregivers been aware that it's a real problem—and easily treated. Untreated, it can result in school failure, alcohol or drug abuse, even suicide.

Childhood depression is not just sadness. All children have days when they feel low self-esteem, withdraw from others or seem overly sensitive and weepy. Depression that needs professional evaluation is an illness—not a “phase,” bad behavior or due to bad parenting.

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, about five percent of children and teens are depressed at a level that requires treatment.

Parents should seek professional help if a child experiences one or more of these symptoms for weeks on end:

- Persistent sadness
- Withdrawal from friends or activities once enjoyed
- Feeling bored all the time
- Increased irritability, agitation, anger or hostility
- Loss of energy, enthusiasm or motivation
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Missed school or a decline in school performance
- Increased guilt, self-blame or self-degradation



**Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial in children with depression since learning, social maturation, people skills and friendships are all part of a healthy childhood.**

- Frequent physical complaints with no physical cause
- Poor self-esteem
- Talk about death or suicide
- Drug or alcohol abuse

It's not always easy to tell there's a problem. Younger children often have difficulty communicating their feelings; older ones may refuse to.

The first steps toward getting the child the help he or she needs can include:

1. Be aware of the behaviors that are of concern, how long they have been going on and how severe they seem
2. Talk to the child in a non-threatening way to try and find

out what he or she is thinking and feeling

3. Call a doctor to discuss the situation and get advice or a referral to a mental health professional

4. Ask questions about treatment and services.

Since every child deserves to experience the joys of being a kid, proper counseling and medication can make a difference. Children who exhibit symptoms of depression should be referred to mental health professionals who specialize in treating children and adolescents.

One of the nation's leading behavioral health care companies, PacifiCare Behavioral Health, has therapists specially trained in treating children with depression in its network of clinicians. The approach is comprehensive and tailored to the unique needs of each child.

“As a parent and psychiatrist, I can easily relate to the challenges parents face with this,” says Jerry Vaccaro, M.D., president of PacifiCare Behavioral Health. “We help our members identify depression and support them in their successful treatment.”

To learn more about children and depression, see the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org), The American Academy of Pediatricians at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) and PacifiCare Behavioral Health at [www.pbhi.com](http://www.pbhi.com).