



# Depression And Anxiety in Children

# What is Depression?

- ▶ Depression is a mental illness in which a person has persistent feelings of sadness, irritability, loneliness, hopelessness, and guilt. It is a mental health disorder that can be successfully treated.

# Childhood Depression

- ▶ Occurs when the feelings of depression persist and interfere with a child or adolescent's ability to function.

# Childhood Depression


- Is different than the normal "blues" and everyday emotions that occur as a child develops
- 5% of children and adolescents suffer from depression at any given point in time.

# Childhood Depression

- Many children with depression can go undiagnosed.
- A child's depressed mood may be evidenced by acting out behavior (this occurs more frequently in younger children). They may yell, scream, be defiant, use foul language and throw temper tantrums.
- They are sometimes misdiagnosed as having ADHD.
- Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have learning, conduct or anxiety disorders are at a higher risk for depression.

# What causes depression in children?

- **There is no one cause of depression**
- **Depression can be caused by a biochemical imbalance in the brain.**
- **It can be triggered by a traumatic event.**
- **Research suggests that there is a complex interplay between biological, genetic, and psychosocial factors (distressing life events) that lead to depression.**
- **Depression tends to run in families.**



**As teachers and school staff we see  
students every day and can observe  
the warning signs of depression.**

## Depression in Children: Signs and Symptoms

- Irritability or anger
- Excessive sadness, crying, and/ or whining
- Feelings of hopelessness(can manifest as negative self-talk)
- Feelings of worthlessness (kids may feel worthless, unloved or stupid)
- Social withdrawal—withdrawal from friends and activities
- Increased sensitivity to rejection
- Major changes in appetite—either increased or decreased
- Changes in sleep—sleeplessness or excessive sleep
- Vocal outbursts

## Depression in Children: Signs and Symptoms

- Excessive guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue or low energy—too tired to play
- Academic decline because of **not** participating, paying attention, or completing school work
- Feeling miserable most of the time—regardless of the activity
- Children may hide or sequester themselves to avoid family and social interactions
- Frequent physical complaints such as headaches and stomachaches
- Giving away beloved toys or possessions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

## Other "Red Flags"

- ▶ Play that involves excessive aggression toward oneself or others
- ▶ Play that involves persistent sad themes
- ▶ With depression the behaviors will last more than two weeks – more than a temporary slump!

# Suicidal thoughts and ideations should be taken seriously

- Talk about wanting to die
- Drawings or behaviors involving the student dying or his or her death
- Although relatively rare in children under 12, young children do attempt suicide and may do so impulsively when they are upset or angry.
- Girls are more likely to attempt suicide but boys are more likely to actually kill themselves when they make an attempt.

# What can we do at school:

- ▶ Recognize the signs
- ▶ Consult with school social worker or school psychologist
- ▶ Listen when our students share information about their feelings
- ▶ Provide unconditional support—be there for them
- ▶ Help student implement coping strategies
- ▶ Help student by highlighting positive skills and interests
- ▶ Help family monitor symptoms – Be hyper-vigilante and report changes you notice to parent/guardian
- ▶ With signed consent, communicate with child's doctor or therapist

## Good news depression can be treated

- ▶ Referral to pediatrician for evaluation of symptoms
- ▶ Referral to mental health provider for counseling
- ▶ Children with depression benefit from individual therapy
- ▶ Child may also benefit from family therapy
- ▶ Child's doctor may recommend medication



**Watch this video about the signs of childhood depression.**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkUym5GwqQs>

# Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Anxiety is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences at times.
- ▶ Anxiety is the emotion that protects people in “fight or flight” situations. When anxiety is prolonged or occurs at other times, it is an anxiety disorder.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders are serious mental disturbances.
- ▶ For people with anxiety disorders, worry and fear are constant and overwhelming.
- ▶ The anxiety is so severe that it interferes significantly with occupational and educational functioning, social activities and close relationships.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders may develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality and life events.
- ▶ There are often physical symptoms that occur along side anxiety disorders. Some symptoms may include, heart palpitations, sweating, faintness, stomachaches, difficulty sleeping and irritability.
- ▶ It is estimated that 40 million adult Americans suffer from anxiety disorders.
- ▶ 13% of children and adolescents are affected by anxiety disorders each year.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders are highly treatable with therapy and/or medication.
- ▶ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) has several different categories of anxiety disorders.

# Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Social Anxiety
- ▶ Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- ▶ Panic Disorder
- ▶ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ▶ Separation Anxiety

# How to help children experiencing anxiety in school

- ▶ Be reassuring of their safety (just remember that lots of positive attention to anxious behavior reinforces the anxiety).
- ▶ Connect with a “safe” person at school (Refer to school social worker or psychologist).
- ▶ Gradually expose the child to the situation (take 1 step at a time).
- ▶ Provide social skills development so children can learn to cope. They need to learn that they will be okay—they can do it.
- ▶ Increase child’s assertiveness skills so they can learn to ask for what they need—stick up for themselves.
- ▶ Teach these children relaxation/self soothing techniques.
- ▶ Teach these children to self talk.
- ▶ Boost their self esteem/confidence (have them identify strengths).
- ▶ Provide support to parents during this stressful time.
- ▶ School social worker may refer student for outside mental health counseling (outside of school, a parent may wish to have their child participate in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, family therapy or try medication).
- ▶ \*Separation Anxiety is usually temporary and part of normal development (children figuring out the world around them)

# Anxiety in children is treatable

- ▶ Referral to therapist for Individual therapy and/or family therapy
- ▶ Cognitive behavioral therapy
- ▶ Biofeedback/neurofeedback
- ▶ Teaching self-soothing strategies
- ▶ Referral to pediatrician or psychiatrist for medication