

Top Tips for Childhood Depression

Encourage Your Child to Talk

Take the time to listen to your child's concerns and show you're listening by giving your child your undivided attention. Empathise with your child no matter how trivial you believe their problem is; remember the problem is real and upsetting to them.

Try to avoid jumping in with solutions – responding to your child's distress with logic might make things worse.

If your child doesn't want to talk, give them space. See if there's someone else they'd rather speak to (e.g. a family friend), and if not, offer them a hug

Give Reassurance

Let your child know that there are things they can do to feel better and reassure them that you're here to help. Some children are ashamed of their feelings. Help your child to understand that they're not "weird" and that other people feel like this sometimes too.

Help Your Child Change their Behaviour

Depression makes activities less enjoyable so many children withdraw and stop participating in their usual activities. Over the longer-term this can make depression worse.

Encourage your child to continue to participate in their normal activities. If your child is reluctant to do this, encourage them to partially participate (e.g. participate in some activities but not others, participate for a shorter period of time, etc.)

Help your child identify things that used to make them happy and encourage them to do at least 2-3 pleasant activities each week. If your child's mood is particularly low they may need you to help them think of enjoyable activities.

Prioritise Sleep + Diet

Establish a bedtime routine and find ways to help your child relax before sleep. Try having a bubble bath, reading, or listening to soothing music. Help your child to eat a balanced diet. If your child isn't hungry or feels too nauseas to eat, offer their favourite foods or help them to eat smaller meals at more regular intervals.

Address Underlying Causes

If there's a clear trigger for your child's depression and it's changeable, offer practical help. For example, if your child is struggling at school offer to help them with their homework. If your child is having trouble with their peers, ask if they'd like help coming up with a solution and help them brainstorm ideas.

DEPRESSION

1 in 10 children develop depression, but signs of childhood depression are difficult to detect.

Warning signs to look out for in children and adolescents include:

- Irritability + agitation
- Being emotional + teary
- Low motivation
- Feeling bored all the time
- Reduced interest in activities
- Preferring to be alone
- Requesting days off school
- Sensitivity to perceived criticism
- Changes to sleep and appetite
- Feeling tired and lethargic
- Trouble concentrating
- Decline in school performance
- Unusual challenging behaviour
- Frequent stomachaches or headaches
- Thoughts about death and dying
- Urges to self-harm

It can be alarming to learn that your child is depressed, but there are things you can do to help.

This tips sheet covers strategies for helping your child through mild depression.

If your child's symptoms continue or are more severe speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.