

Children and Depression

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Depression is not only a threat to teenagers and adult as it can also happen to children. Researchers in Washington University School of Medicine have stated that children can have similar depressive symptoms found in adults, up to the severity of them.

RELEVANT FACTORS

Environment. Genetics. Parents and relatives. Illnesses. Events.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Important signs of depression to be aware of.

DIAGNOSE & TREATMENT

Know the next step to take.



Although the cause

of depression in children is not exactly known, researches on depression in adults have stated that it depends on the genetic predisposition and influence from the environment.

"It's partly from the environment and genetics," said Dr. Elizabeth Rody, child & adolescent psychiatrist and medical director for *Magellan Behavioral Health's* New Jersey Regional Service Center. "A heart condition can be caused by multiple factors: it may be that your family history has heart irregularities and at the same time, unhealthy lifestyle. Both has probabilities as the causes of a heart condition. Depression is similar, it is influenced by both genetic and environment."



ADHD and learning disabilities, for example dyslexia, are also noted as factors in the occurrence of depression in children.

Depression in children can be triggered by various events or trauma, for example the death of a parent, a friend moving away, difficulties adjusting in school, difficulties making friends, or substance/alcohol abuse.



Higher risks are also found in environmental factors, such as physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, neglect, and substance abuse history of the family.

Children with parents who have been diagnosed with depression have higher risk of having it themselves.

Divorce and losses of loved ones may trigger emotional instability in children, though has not been found as definite factors of depression.

THE SURVEYS

In the US, 1% of preschool age children were diagnosed with depression, while the statistics on school age children and adolescents were 2% and 5-8%.

Meanwhile, Australian survey showed that 3,7% of boys and 2,1% of girls

in the age range of 6-12 years old has experienced depression episode.

The unique thing is, the ratio between girls and boys is 2:1. According to the research, depression in preschool children is found in 1%, and less than 2% for primary school children. The statistics on 12-17 age group was found to be 3-10%.

Signs, Symptoms, & Treatment

Usually the child with depression may experience lethargy, easily annoyed, and pulling themselves away from other people. Children with depression may also lose interest in activities which they used to love.

Here are the signs & symptoms of depression that needs to be known:

1. Lack of motivation.

Decrease in motivation is shown, including being easily bored, missing school days, and negative attitude in school.

2. Physical signs.

This includes lack of energy, signs of chronic fatigue, and constant complaining about stomachache or headache.

3. Significant changes.

Changes are happening such as pulling away from family and friends, or changes in eating and sleeping habit (e.g. drastic increase or decrease of weight, sleeping all the time, or not sleeping at all).

4. Talking about suicide.

Sudden interest in topics about suicide or death.

5. Emotional roller coaster.

Screaming without a logical reason, often crying and complaining about everything, and too sensitive to rejection or failure.

6. Doing extreme things.

Using means and effort to run away from home, and doing violent activities to themselves or other people.

FOR HOW LONG?

According to *Mental Health: A report of the surgeon general*, children may have a depressed episode for seven to nine months.

Other developmental experts claimed that depressive symptoms last longer than two weeks need a further assessment by professionals.

DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS

Diagnosis is determined according to its symptoms. Treatment for depressed children and adolescents involve combination of individual psychotherapy and family counselling.

To increase the effectiveness of treatment, according to Rody, it is best to include parents, siblings, and other important people in the child's life, such as teacher or grandparents.

TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

The key is to always being with them and listening to them. Spending time with them by playing, visiting places together, and doing whatever they like may help as well.

Invite them to calm their feelings through playing dolls, drawing, writing, and roleplaying.

Consult a psychologist to help you if you feel like your child is having problems to feel comfortable with you.