



## Depression Warning Signs: A Parent's Guide

Life can be pretty tough and stressors like the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can make children and adults feel even more down or sad. As a parent, you can pay attention to mood changes in your child by looking for some of the warning signs below.

### What is Depression?

Depression is a relatively common mental health problem that affects a person's physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Depression may be caused by **biological factors** (e.g. family history of depression, hormonal changes, medical illnesses, brain chemical changes, etc.), **social-emotional factors** (e.g. ineffective coping skills, low self-esteem, negative thinking styles, etc.) and/or **environmental factors** (e.g. poor peer relationships, academic problems, stressful events, etc.).

### What does Depression look like?

Symptoms of depression can vary depending on development and age. Generally speaking, however, caregivers may notice the following common signs and symptoms:

- Sad, down, blue mood most of the day, nearly every day
- Children more often depict grouchy or irritable moods
- Noticeably reduced interest or enjoyment in things that used to be fun
- Not wanting to be around other people as much as you used to
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping more or sleeping less)
- Changes in appetite (more/less) or weight (gain/loss)
- Young children may not meet weight milestones



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- Feeling fatigued, more tired than usual or having less energy
- Problems with concentrating (e.g. schoolwork), focus, decisiveness
- Feeling helpless or worthless
- Having low self-esteem and/or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- More aches and pains (e.g. headaches, stomachaches, etc.)
- Recurring thoughts about death, self-harm or suicide

## **How can Depression look Different across Childhood?**

### **Infancy and early childhood**

- Prolonged sadness and/or irritability in combination with disrupted sleep, poor appetite and little activity
- Limited or low engagement, responsiveness and reciprocity with caregivers and others
- Delayed achievement or regression of developmental milestones

### **Childhood**

- Expressed guilt, low self-esteem, poor self-efficacy
- Somatic complaints, such as headaches, stomachaches or feeling ill
- Irritability, tantrums or other behavior problems

### **Adolescence**

- Withdrawal from adults, but may still spend time with close friends
- For teens, emotional changes can be expressed through irritability or anger in lieu of sad or down mood
- Poor sleep hygiene (getting sleep, but at varied hours)

## **What do I do if I'm worried about my child's mood?**

For some strategies you can try at home, check out our "Helping Kids Manage Depression: A Parent's Guide" on our website at [www.childrensnational.org/return-to-school](http://www.childrensnational.org/return-to-school). If you are worried about how your child is feeling or behaving, you can seek help and support in your community. Do not hesitate to reach out and establish care with a mental health provider to give your child additional support: contact Children's National at 202-729-3300.