

# Childhood and Adolescent Depression

## Common Symptoms of Childhood and Adolescent Depression:

- Feeling or appearing depressed, sad, or irritable
- Not enjoying enjoyable aspects of life
- Spending less time with friends or less involvement in after-school activities
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Feeling tired or lacking energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Academic decline and lack of attention to schoolwork
- Having suicidal thoughts or interest in death
- Depressed children and adolescents may also have physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches.

**Substance abuse is more common among adolescents with depression because of the misconception that it will relieve their low mood (low energy and sadness).**

## Causes of Childhood and Adolescent Depression:

- Finding the cause of childhood and adolescent depression is not always easy. Sometimes childhood stress or the loss of a loved one can play a role in depression. This is perhaps why we see more depression in children of divorce.
- Violence, bullying, and spending too much time on digital social networks can go hand in hand with depression.
- Depression may also have genetic and hereditary roots. Having other mental health problems such as learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, or behavioral disorders puts children and adolescents at higher risk for depression.



## The Role of Parents in Diagnosing Childhood and Adolescent Depression:

- Sometimes we parents don't even think about depression at an early age. Sometimes we are not sure if our child's mood is due to depression.
- If we suspect that our child may be depressed, we need to increase our communication with them. We should ask them how they are feeling or what is bothering them.
- Usually when such questions are asked directly to our child, in some cases we may hear that they are not happy or sad. Sometimes their answers may indicate self-harm, interest in death, or suicidal thoughts.
- Such answers should be taken very seriously, as the risk of self-harm is very high in adolescent depression.
- Another way to diagnose childhood depression is to consult a child and adolescent psychiatrist or psychologist.

## Treatment of Childhood and Adolescent Depression:

- There are effective treatments for childhood and adolescent depression. Non-pharmacological treatment may include one or more of the following:
  - Psychotherapy (treatment through talk and counseling)
  - Family meetings
  - The psychologist contacting the school and talking to our child's teacher, with our permission as parents
- Two types of psychotherapy have the most impact on the treatment of childhood and adolescent depression:
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy (increasing the individual's awareness of the thought patterns underlying each behavior and working to modify them)
  - Interpersonal psychotherapy, which works to teach interpersonal communication and group participation skills with the goal of reducing stress in the adolescent.
- A psychiatrist may prescribe medication to treat childhood and adolescent depression.