

Clinical Depression - Children and Adolescents

What is Clinical Depression?

Depression is a word sometimes used to describe the sadness people, including children and adolescents, feel when things go wrong in their everyday lives. It is also a word used to describe a serious mental illness involving sadness and despair, feelings of hopelessness, and often physical symptoms which interfere with everyday life. This kind of depression is called Clinical Depression. We will use the term Clinical Depression when discussing it on this site. When you read about Clinical Depression in other places, it may simply be called Depression.

Clinical Depression affects children and adolescents as well as adults. About eight percent of teenagers and two and a half percent of children have Clinical Depression. Clinical Depression in children and adolescents is often not recognized because their symptoms are not always like those of adults. The signs of Clinical Depression that are the same in adults and young people include:

- Intense feelings of sadness, despair and worthlessness
- Crying spells
- Lack of interest in being with friends
- An increase or decrease in sleeping and/or eating
- Feeling tired all the time
- Frequent unclear physical complaints (for example, headaches or stomach aches)
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide (Read more on [Suicide in Children/Adolescents](#) to learn the warning signs, who is at risk, how you can help and for other information.)

The signs of Clinical Depression that are often present in children and adolescents, but not so often in adults include:

- Misbehaving, being very irritable and angry
- Arguing and fighting
- Being bored most of the time
- Failing grades in school
- Reckless behavior

In Clinical Depression, some or all of these symptoms happen almost every day over a period of two weeks or more. Clinical Depression is a serious illness that can interfere with a child's or adolescent's functioning at home, at school and with friends. Some

Source: <http://www.mhawestchester.org/content/clinical-depression-children-and-adolescents>

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children and adolescents with Clinical Depression are at risk for suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 10-18 year olds.

What causes Clinical Depression?

Clinical Depression tends to run in families. Research shows that changes in brain chemistry are associated with Clinical Depression. It can be triggered by a life crisis, such as the death of someone close, an illness or a serious accident. Clinical Depression may also occur without any obvious cause.

How can Clinical Depression Be Treated?

Clinical Depression in children and adolescents can be treated successfully. Treatment is especially important because of the risk of suicide associated with Clinical Depression. Treatments include play therapy for younger children, talking therapies (or counseling) for older children and adolescents, and medications. A combination of these kinds of treatments is often effective. Family therapy may be helpful, as well as changes in the young person's home and school environments to reduce stress. For many children and adolescents, Clinical Depression will recur even after successful treatment, and it will need to be treated again.

The biggest problem with Clinical Depression in children and adolescents is that it is not recognized and thus these young people do not get the treatment they need.

Additional Information About Clinical Depression

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/Facts_for_Families_Pages/The_Depressed_Child_04.aspx

The Academy is a professional organization for physicians who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of emotional and behavior disorders and mental illness in children and adolescents. This page has a brief, easy to read description of Clinical Depression in children and adolescents, as well as links to pages about children and grief, teen suicide and other related issues.

National Mental Health Association (NMHA)

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screening-tools>

NMHA is a national organization dedicated to promoting mental health through education and advocacy. It has a Depression Screening site with a question and answer test about Clinical Depression that may be useful for adolescents. It also has other helpful information about symptoms and treatment for Clinical Depression, educational resources and places to turn for help. The site offers information in English and Spanish. Their telephone number is 800-969-6642.

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General

<http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/access/NNBBHS.pdf>

This is the first report on mental health from the United States Surgeon General. It was issued in December 1999. Although dated, this remains a useful reference. This site has a thorough description of Clinical Depression in children and adolescents. It has information on the different kinds of Clinical Depression, their causes, risks and treatments.

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

NIMH is an agency of the United States government. This site has clear information about mental health conditions and provides information on how individuals and family members can recognize symptoms and get the help they need.