

Would You Know if Your Child Had Depression?

Children with depression and other mental illnesses are not getting the help they need. Persistent [feelings of sadness and hopelessness](#) in teens and younger kids are on the rise. Also, suicide rates have been steadily increasing among girls aged 10 – 14 since 2007, according to [a recent study](#). But, in many cases, parents don't realize that their children are depressed.

Even when they do, stigma and access to services are primary barriers to children getting help, according to [Dr. Stefania Prendes-Alvarez](#), youth psychiatry expert with the University of Miami Health System.

“Different levels of psychoeducation definitely contribute,” she says. “This includes how much knowledge parents have on the effective treatment options that exist for different conditions.” Parents’ own belief systems about mental health will also influence what they decide for their children.

In 2016, fewer than half of the three million kids who experienced depression received treatment, according to the US Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health. They also listed [stigma and cultural norms as obstacles](#), as well as a shortage of adolescent psychiatrists, particularly in rural areas.

Suicide is the extreme result of an untreated mental disorder but it is not the only risk. Untreated mental health conditions can cause a lot of distress to kids and may interfere with their development, says Dr. Prendes.

Signs of depression in children

If your child starts isolating themselves, not doing things they used to enjoy, experiencing changes in sleeping and eating habits and declining grades, it may be time to talk to someone.



[How to Spot a Troubled Teen](#)

Many adolescents struggle with mental health issues that without intervention can lead to self-harm or other serious issues. But, if caught early, kids can get the help they need.

Do not just rely on medication, she says. “I personally speak with families about the importance and synergistic effects of utilizing both psychopharmacology (medications) together with psychotherapy.”

Finding a therapist can be difficult. It is important to trust your child’s therapist and feel that their office is a safe space, so this may take meeting with two or three to find the right fit. “Parents need to feel that the therapist is going to work closely with their child while also checking in with them periodically and providing guidance to them,” says Dr. Prendes.

If your child resists counseling, talk with him or her about emotions and what's on their mind, says Dr. Prendes. A good therapist will work with you and your child to set some common goals to work on in therapy.

“Ultimately most kids will recognize that there's something not great about their reality and I will try to get them to realize that I can be someone who can help with this,” she says. The most important thing is to make sure they get treatment.

If you observe a child who seems depressed and is exhibiting warning signs of mental illness seek help, consult your healthcare provider or mental health professional. In crisis or life-threatening situations, call 911, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or go to your nearest hospital emergency room.

Natasha Bright is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News. Her writing has also been featured on the Huffington Post and Scary Mommy websites.
