

## Helping Your Child Cope With Depression

### Routines

- Predictable routines lead to fewer surprises and less stress for everyone!
- Write them out and be consistent.
- Sleep Hygiene
  - Create a regular sleep schedule and stick to it, even when school is out.
  - Decrease intake of sugar, caffeine, and second hand smoke for 3 hours before bedtime.
  - Use relaxation activities for 20 minutes before bedtime.
  - Create a routine of reading, storytelling, and/or bathing before sleep.
  - Quiet music may be helpful.
  - Avoid TV and video games for at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
  - Keep TV out of the bedroom.
- Nutrition
  - Breakfast is essential.
  - Encourage balanced diet with plenty of protein.
  - Encourage water limit pop, juices, and other sweetened beverages.
  - Try to have at least one family meal every day. Sit at the table and talk about the day without the TV.
- Exercise
  - Encourage exercise at least 4 days per week for at least 20 minutes.
  - Walk in place during TV commercials.
  - Exercise together as a family.
  - Consider using a step pedometer to give a measurement of actual exercise.
  - Set small, concrete goals that are achievable, and build from there.

### Social Support

- Increasing social support helps to improve moods, behavior, and relationships.
- Expanding social support helps to improve feelings of connectedness and improves communication.
- Purchase some inexpensive invitations or make some at home.
- Ask your child to make a list of people to whom they can give or mail the invitations.
- The invitations are to ask people to be open to a visit or a phone call when:
  - Support is needed.
  - Help is needed with solving problems.
  - Some encouragement is needed to improve mood.

### Tools to Help Manage Symptoms of Depression

- Bubbles
  - Encourage taking slow, deep breaths to get as many bubbles as possible.
  - Do this at least once a day, or as often as needed.

- Music
  - Have the child listen to music that matches their mood, and then shift to soothing, relaxing, and meaningful music before a stressful situation, to calm after a stressful situation, or at the end of the day to relax and help get to sleep.
- Giving rewards
  - Set concrete, specific, and manageable behavior goals that will be expected of the child.
  - There can be small steps that support reaching the final goal.
  - “When you do this, then you can get this...”
  - Helps improve sense of control and improve motivation.

### **Consider the Environment**

- Grief and loss are virtually universal childhood experiences. Reactions to these events can be very different for each of us. Talk to your doctor about the possible need for counseling if this does not seem to be resolving in one or two months.
- Reduce stress. Think about making short-term changes in demands and responsibilities, including asking for extra time on school projects or other ways of reducing stress at school. If you as a parent are under stress, it is important that you address your own needs so that you are better able to support your child.

### **Educate Your Family**

- Depression is very common and not the result of lack of coping ability or personal strength.
- Your child is not making the symptoms up. What looks like laziness or crossness can be signs of depression.
- There is often a family history of depression. This may help other family members to understand.
- Hopelessness is a symptom of depression, not a sign of reality. But negative views can be hard to get past.
- Treatment works, though it can take several weeks. Your input will be very important.

### **Help Your Child to Develop Cognitive and Coping Skills**

- Many negative thoughts can be challenged and looked at in another way. Sometimes it can help to use phrases like, “Little steps uphill, big steps downhill”; “Long journeys start with a single step”; “The glass is half full, not half empty.”
- Relaxation techniques and visualization (eg, practicing relaxing by thinking of a pleasant memory, imagining being in a pleasant place) can be helpful for sleep and for stressful situations.
- Take advantage of what your child already does to feel better or relax and, if appropriate, encourage more of that. Encourage a focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Encourage doing more of what the child does well.

### **Help Your Child to Develop Problem-Solving Skills**

- Determine what small, reachable steps would help your child feel that he or she is on the way to overcoming his or her problems.
- Suggest that your child begin to list out difficulties, put them in an order of importance to them, and focus efforts on one issue, one small step at a time.

### **Rehearse Behavior and Social Skills**

- Reactions to certain situations or people often seem to trigger or maintain low mood. If these can be identified, assist your child in developing and practicing ways to avoid those situations or to respond in a different way.
- Encourage your child to practice doing things and thinking thoughts that improve mood.

## Create a Safety and Emergency Plan

- Develop a list of telephone numbers to call in the event of a sudden increase in distress.
- The **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- Remove, destroy, or lock up guns and other weapons, medications, including over the counter medications and Tylenol, and alcohol from the home.
- Watch for risk factors for suicide such as increased agitation, stressors, loss of rational thinking, and expressed wishes to die.

## Other Resources

### Books for Adolescents

- When Nothing Matters Anymore: A Survival Guide for Depressed Teens -- *B. Cobain*
- Recovering from Depression: A Workbook for Teens -- *M. E. Copeland & S. Copans*
- Conquering the Beast Within: How I Fought Depression & Won...& How You Can, Too -- *C. Irwin*
- Raising a Moody Child: How to Cope with Depression and Bipolar Disorder – *M. Fristad, PhD & J. S. Goldberg Arnold, PhD*

### Websites

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
  - 1-800-950-6264 [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- Families for Depression Awareness (FFDA)
  - [www.familyaware.org](http://www.familyaware.org)
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry – Depression Resource Center
  - <http://www.aacap.org/cs/Depression.ResourceCenter>

Portions of this information are modified from: American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Mental Health. Addressing Mental Health Concerns in Primary Care: A Clinician's Toolkit [CD-ROM]. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2010.

