AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

FACTS for FAMILIES

No. 04 July 2013

The Depressed Child

Not only adults become depressed. Children and teenagers also may have depression, as well. The good news is that depression is a treatable illness. Depression is defined as an illness when the feelings of depression persist and interfere with a child or adolescent's ability to function.

About 5 percent of children and adolescents in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time. Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have attentional, learning, conduct or anxiety disorders are at a higher risk for depression. Depression also tends to run in families.

The behavior of depressed children and teenagers may differ from the behavior of depressed adults. Child and adolescent psychiatrists advise parents to be aware of signs of depression in their youngsters.

If one or more of these signs of depression persist, parents should seek help:

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying
- Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Hopelessness
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Poor concentration
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior

A child who used to play often with friends may now spend most of the time alone and without interests. Things that were once fun now bring little joy to the depressed child. Children and adolescents who are depressed may say they want to be dead or may talk about suicide. Depressed children and adolescents are at increased risk for committing suicide. Depressed adolescents may abuse alcohol or other drugs as a way of trying to feel better.

3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW ■ Washington, DC 20016-3007 ■ 202.966.7300 ■ (FAX) 202.966.2891
http://www.aacap.org

The Depressed Child, "Facts for Families," No. 4 (5/08)

Children and adolescents who cause trouble at home or at school may also be suffering from depression. Because the youngster may not always seem sad, parents and teachers may not realize that troublesome behavior is a sign of depression. When asked directly, these children can sometimes state they are unhappy or sad.

Early diagnosis and treatment are essential for depressed children. Depression is a real illness that requires professional help. Comprehensive treatment often includes both individual and family therapy. For example, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) are forms of individual therapy shown to be effective in treating depression. Treatment may also include the use of antidepressant medication. For help, parents should ask their physician to refer them to a qualified mental health professional, who can diagnose and treat depression in children and teenagers.

Also see the following Facts for Families:
#8 Children and Grief
#10 Teen Suicide
#21 Psychiatric Medication for Children
#38 Bipolar Disorder in Teens
#86 Psychotherapies for Children and Adolescents
#00 Definition of a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

# # #

If you find *Facts for Families*© helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality for all children, please consider donating to the **Campaign for America's Kids**. Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute *Facts for Families*, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to ***Campaign for America's Kids***, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families© information sheets are developed, owned and distributed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and are supported by a grant from the Klingenstein Third Generation Foundation. Hard copies of *Facts* sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale or profit. All *Facts* can be viewed and printed from the AACAP Web site (www.aacap.org). *Facts* sheets many not be reproduced, duplicated or posted on any other Internet Web site **without written consent from AACAP**. Organizations are permitted to create links to AACAP's Web site and specific *Facts* sheets. To purchase complete sets of *Facts for Families*, please contact the AACAP's Communications & Marketing Coordinator at 202.966.7300 ext.154.

Copyright © 2008 by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry