

# WHAT IS DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN?

Depression is a serious mood disorder that can take the joy from a child's life. It is normal for a child to be moody or sad from time to time. You can expect these feelings after the death of a pet or a move to a new city. But if these feelings last for weeks or months, they may be a sign of depression.



## What are the symptoms?

A child may be depressed if he or she:

- Is grumpy, sad, or bored most of the time.
- Does not take pleasure in things he or she used to enjoy.

A child who is depressed may also:

- Lose or gain weight.
- Sleep too much or too little.
- Feel hopeless, worthless, or guilty.
- Have trouble concentrating, thinking, or making decisions.
- Think about death or suicide a lot.

The symptoms of depression are often overlooked at first. It can be hard to see that symptoms are all part of the same problem.

Also, the symptoms may be different depending on how old the child is.

- Very young children may lack energy and become withdrawn. They may show little emotion, seem to feel hopeless, and have trouble sleeping.
- Grade-school children may have a lot of headaches or stomachaches. They may lose interest in friends and activities that they liked in the past. Some children with severe depression may see or hear things that aren't there (hallucinate) or have false beliefs (delusions).
- Teens may sleep a lot or move or speak more slowly than usual. Teens with severe depression may hallucinate or have delusions.

Depression can range from mild to severe. A child who feels a little "down" most of the time for a year or more may have a mild, ongoing form of depression called dysthymia (say "dis-THY-mee-uh"). In its most severe form, depression can cause a child to lose hope and want to die.