



# The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

*Shining light on mental health through education.*

## Depression: Ways to Support Your Child at Home

Has your child or teen been diagnosed with depression? In addition to any professional treatment, there are ways to support them at home. See our tips below to better understand your child's behaviors and help them manage.

Children and teens with **Depression** can be sad or irritable for prolonged periods of time. Nearly one in 10 kids will experience a bout of childhood depression, but it is highly treatable. Learn more about the behaviors and challenges that can be associated with depression here:

<https://mghclaycenter.org/topic/depression>

- 1. Talk About Depression With the Family.** Talking openly lessens stigma and increases understanding.
  - Younger children, developmentally, often think that their personal thoughts and desires affect what happens in the world. They may believe that having depression is their fault. Help them understand that depression is a disease — it's not anyone's fault and it's nothing to be ashamed of.
  - Older kids might believe with certainty that they will never feel better. This is in line with how teens approach the world. Help them understand that they have a treatable disease that does in fact get better.
  - Siblings often worry when a brother or sister becomes depressed. Make sure to talk with other children about depression as a disease, and changes in behavior they may see in their sibling who has depression.
  - Make it part of your normal family routine to talk about all kinds of feelings – even feelings your child thinks you wouldn't be comfortable hearing, like thoughts of suicide. By making it part of a routine, your child is more likely to come to you when they are struggling with something.
  - If you suffered from depression in the past and had a positive experience with treatment, this can be a helpful thing to share. It helps to reinforce in your child that they will in fact get better.
- 2. Help Your Child to Exercise.** Even short periods of exercise can help with depression. Start small if you need to, with tasks like walking the dog or to the store. As your child gets better, activity will become part of a normal routine.
- 3. Make Sleep a Priority for Your Child.** Getting enough sleep is very important for recovery from depression. If your child has poor sleep patterns, it could also be a symptom of their depression, so it's important to be patient and give things time to even out. You can help by encouraging regular bedtimes and waking times.
- 4. Support Positive Self-Esteem.** Low self-esteem and feeling bad about oneself can be a symptom of depression. Use praise freely but sincerely. If you offer praise when it's not deserving, your child may feel even lower in mood. At the same time, they will benefit from sincere encouragement in situations that are often taken for granted.
- 5. Involve Your Child's School.** Many parents worry that sharing their child's diagnosis of depression will stigmatize their child. But schools can help provide resources and accommodations. Brainstorm with teachers and other school officials. Working together can keep your child engaged in school during an episode of depression, which can improve self-esteem and academic performance.
- 6. Encourage Social Interactions.** Children with depression often feel isolated and don't want to reach out to others – even for kids who are usually outgoing. Plan social events that include your child.
  - For younger kids, try to arrange shorter play dates. Limiting the time helps them from becoming overwhelmed.
  - For older kids, encourage them to join a club or school activity they enjoy. This can help to foster social interactions, if they can motivate themselves to attend. Or, together, research a youth support group in your area.
- 7. Talk About Medication.** Depression is often treated with a combination of medications and therapy. Ask your child if they have questions about any medications to be taken and learn about them together. Talk about possible side effects, too. This will help your child to understand what to expect and better stick to their treatment plan. It may also help them better explain their depression and treatment to friends.

**Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.**

*For more resources on suicide and other topics, visit us online: [mghclaycenter.org](https://mghclaycenter.org)*

