

When Your Infant or Toddler Is Sad



Depression is a real illness that affects children of all ages.

Some of these symptoms can be due to other illnesses so it is important to speak with your doctor.

Symptoms:

Your Infant or Toddler...

- ☆ does not respond when talked to or touched.
- ☆ does not smile or cry.
- ☆ cries all the time and is difficult to calm.
- ☆ does not gain weight.
- ☆ does not want to play.
- ☆ has problems eating or sleeping.
- ☆ has constipation or diarrhea frequently.
- ☆ is restless.
- ☆ is oversensitive to touch or noise.

Symptoms: Your Toddler...

- ☆ is frustrated easily.
- ☆ lacks interest in exploring the world.
- ☆ does not interact with peers
- ☆ wets the bed after six months of consistently being dry.
- ☆ worries or is scared a lot.
- ☆ child has slow speech or body movements.

Every child is different. Sometimes it is difficult for caregivers to know what is a symptom of an illness and what is normal behavior.

The key is that the symptoms occur over several weeks. Write down signs and symptoms that you notice and take to your doctor.

Causes of Depression

- ☆ Difficulty bonding.
- ☆ Your child does not have a primary caregiver.
- ☆ Depressed caregiver.
- ☆ Caregiver is inconsistent with rewards and punishments. (This often occurs with children of alcoholics. The alcoholic caregiver yells at the child for playing too loudly, and later calls the child to come and play again.)
- ☆ Your child's basic needs are not met promptly.
- ☆ Caregiver(s) have a lot of stress trying to meet the basic needs of the child.
- ☆ The child's immediate family is under stress, is undergoing significant change, or is frequently in crisis.
- ☆ Your child has witnessed violence. Even children in a crib can be affected by violence.

- ☆ The child is pushed to learn new skills when he or she is not ready.
- ☆ Harsh and frequent physical punishment.
- ☆ Your child has a family history of depression.
- ☆ Your child is suffering some type of abuse.

Treatment

Mental health professionals are just beginning to recognize and treat early childhood depression. Parent education is usually a part of the child's therapy so that the caregiver can be a part of the child's recovery.

It is important that all caregivers participate in the child's recovery.

All therapists are not the same. When taking your child to a counselor or therapist, be sure that person is experienced in early childhood mental health. Most important is your child's relationship with the therapist. Make sure the relationship is good, and if not, find a new therapist. If a suitable counselor or therapist is not available, request one from your physician, health plan, or caseworker.

Resources

Your physician

Zero to Three Foundation
<http://www.zerotothree.org>

National Mental Health Association
(800) 969-6642

United Way Help Line
Austin: (512) 324-1899
Dallas: (214) 379-4357
Ft. Worth: (817) 258-8100
Houston: (713) 957-4357
San Antonio: (210) 227-4357

Mental Health Association in Texas
<http://www.ParentingInformation.org>