

Parenting in a Pandemic

An Informational Newsletter from Relate Counseling Center

DEPRESSION + SUICIDE: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW



Join a Relate Counseling Center therapist on Monday, March 29 from 6-7 pm for a free Facebook

Live webinar on how parents can help kids and teens manage depression and prevent suicide. Simply visit our Facebook page at the designated time to tune into the webinar.



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Parenting Children with Depressive Symptoms



**By Rebecca Enders, MA
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While research on the pandemic's effects on mental health is still in the early stages, current evidence shows a surge in anxiety and depression among children and adolescents since the pandemic began. Over the past year, as the pandemic has progressed, feelings of sadness and stress have increased for people experiencing extended social isolation and loss of school and community support. However, depression is more than feeling sad: it is a persistent change in mood and behavior that can be extremely debilitating (see "Signs Your Child May Be Struggling with Depression" on page 2). Here are some ways to support your child if they are showing symptoms of depression: (continued on page 2)



Parenting Tips (contd.)

Outwardly express calm feelings. It can be very scary if your child is talking about feeling sad, hopeless, apathetic, or wanting to hurt themselves. However, showing that you are scared, angry, or sad may add to their distress. By modeling calm feelings, you are showing that you are a safe person to talk to about their thoughts and emotions.

Be curious, praise, and join with them. Praise your child for being open to sharing their feelings with you. Approach their feelings with curiosity by asking questions such as, "Tell me more about how you are feeling?" "How long have you felt this way?" and "How can I help?" Communicate to your child this is something you will figure out together.

Ask about suicide. When depressive symptoms are present, it's important for parents and caregivers to ask children and teens if they are thinking about suicide. [One myth about suicide](#) is that asking someone if they have thought about it could inspire them to hurt themselves. This is false, and often people struggling with depression or suicidal ideation report being comforted by having someone check in on how they are doing.

Assess for safety & seek additional help. If your child shares they have a method in mind to attempt suicide and have a concrete plan to do so, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room immediately. Additionally, be sure to remove or lock up access to the method they have thought about, such as weapons or prescription medications. If your child is able to name thoughts of death or suicide without a plan or intent to act, meeting with a therapist or their pediatrician can be beneficial to help sort through these thoughts and feelings.

Use the storm metaphor. [The Depression Project](#) uses an excellent metaphor to discuss depression, and walking your child through this metaphor may help them communicate how they are feeling with you. Think of depression in 3 stages: the Cloud Zone, the Rain Zone, and the Storm Zone. In the Cloud Zone, symptoms may be more manageable and the ability to function is higher. In the Rain Zone, symptoms may start to become stronger, and therefore more debilitating - the storm is rolling in. Finally, the Storm Zone is when depression is its strongest, and symptoms may be extremely debilitating and severe. Asking your child what zone they feel they are in each day may help them be able to describe and recognize how their depression symptoms change.

Highlight how feelings are transient. Sometimes when emotions are very strong, especially during a deep depression, a person can feel like things will always be this way. Validate your child's feelings, while also reminding them that all thoughts and feelings are temporary and will come and go with time.

Signs Your Child Might Be Struggling with Depression:

- Increased irritability, sadness, or hopelessness
- Loss of interest in activities they typically enjoy
- Change in weight or appetite
- Change in sleep habits, such as difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual
- Fatigue
- Harsh, negative self-talk
- Difficulty concentrating
- Repeated thoughts of death or suicide, or a suicide attempt

If you notice any of the above symptoms in your child or teen, don't hesitate to reach out for help. Contact Relate Counseling Center at 952-932-7277 to schedule an appointment with a Relate therapist today.

Parenting Resources:

Depression is a very complex topic that can present differently for each individual. Be sure to check out these additional resources and talk with a therapist or doctor for more information.

- [Suicide Risk Factors & Warning Signs](#) - American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- [Sign up to get an email every day for 100 days with a short depression management tip](#) - The Depression Project
- [Signs of Depression During the Pandemic](#) - Child Mind Institute
- [Basic Facts About Depression](#) - Mental Health America
- **Save these numbers in your phone:**
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: at 1-800-273-8255 (en español: 1-888-628-9454; deaf and hard of hearing: dial 711, then 1-800-273-8255)
 - Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741