

Where to Get Help

If your child has not yet seen a doctor, you may raise your concerns with your child's school counsellors if you suspect that he is showing signs of depression. School counsellors are connected to our community mental health service, **REACH** (Response, Early intervention, Assessment in Community mental Health), which can provide further advice and assistance.

If your child is seeking help at our clinic, please raise your concerns with your child's doctor, nurse, or allied health professional.



DEPRESSION



Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Institute of Mental Health
Buangkok Green Medical Park
10 Buangkok View
Singapore 539747
General Enquiries: 6389 2000
Appointment Line: 6389 2200
Mental Health Helpline: 6389 2222

www.imh.com.sg

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WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

All of us feel sad, frustrated or disappointed at times, but depression refers to a more intense and pervasive feeling of great sadness that interferes with everyday tasks such as studying or working and with enjoyment of life in general. Depression is characterised by some or all of the following:

- *persistent feelings of sadness or irritability*
- *poor concentration and difficulties thinking and making decisions*
- *poor sleep or oversleeping*
- *poor appetite or overeating*
- *lethargy and fatigue*
- *loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed*
- *feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate or excessive guilt*
- *recurring thoughts of death or suicide*

In children or adolescents, other signs of depression include:

- *problems at school or with schoolwork*
- *unexplained aches and pains*
- *low self-esteem and sensitivity to criticism*
- *irritability and outbursts of anger*
- *withdrawal from friends or family*



What causes Depression?

Many factors, biological and psychological, as well as social and environmental, are thought to contribute to depression, including:

- a family history of depression
- chemical imbalances in the brain
- unhelpful thinking patterns, such as discounting the positives or thinking in worst-case-scenario terms
- stressful life events, such as parental divorce, family conflict, loss of a family member, or significant life changes, such as changing schools or facing major school exams

Management of Depression

Treatment of depression involves a combination of methods and ways:

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS. These therapies can help your child better understand what depression is and learn ways to manage the symptoms. One commonly used type of psychotherapy involves helping your child identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts and beliefs that contribute to his or her feelings, and learn better coping skills.

FAMILY INTERVENTIONS. It may also be helpful for parents or other family members to receive therapy to address parental or family issues that may affect the child's ability to cope with his or her circumstances.

USE OF MEDICATION. Depending on the severity of the condition, medication may be prescribed to help reduce symptoms of depression. Talk to your child's doctor if you have any queries or concerns about medication.

You can also help your child by being patient, understanding and supportive. Be encouraging and empathise with his or her challenges. Celebrate all small successes and be positive.

CAUTION!

When a child or adolescent feels very sad or angry, he may engage in self-harming behaviour (e.g. self-cutting) as a way of coping with these feelings. He may also feel that life is meaningless or have thoughts of suicide. Inform your child's school personnel, doctor, psychologist or anyone else who is involved in helping your child if you notice the following in your child:

- extreme sadness or happiness
- withdrawal from family or friends and secretive behaviour
- drinking alcohol excessively or using drugs
- talking about death, dying or suicide
- making self-harming or suicide threats or making statements such as "You won't see me anymore" or "I won't be a problem anymore"
- writing farewell notes or saying goodbye
- giving away possessions

In crisis situations, you can call the mental health helpline at 6389 2222, take your child to Emergency Services at IMH, or call the police for assistance.

