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CHILDHOOD DEPRESSION

By

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The following information was adapted from an excellent book entitled “Helping Your Depressed Child – A Step-By-Step Guide For Parents” written by Dr. Martha U. Barnard and published by New Harbinger Publications Inc. (2003). The book gives an excellent overview on this very important and sometimes difficult topic. The following information is provided for you to read and help you in making a decision about whether or not your child may be clinically depressed. Contrary to what many people believe, depression can occur in all ages including very young children. In considering these different symptoms, be aware that for a diagnosis to be made, a child must exhibit at least five of the nine main criteria which are in bold print and the changes will need to have been present for two weeks. Also, the symptoms cannot be explained by other reasons such as a medication the child is taking, the abuse of addictive substances, medical illness, or a grief reaction. These symptoms should be used as a guideline to help you determine if you should take your child to see your family physician or a mental health professional such as a psychologist or social worker. Please note that under each major category, a number of different symptoms are listed. Your child will not exhibit all of the symptoms in most cases even if your child is clinically depressed. Each child has a unique personality and will typically present with one or more of the symptoms in the categories that are relevant for your child. The form has been set up so that you can identify which symptoms have been present over the past two weeks and then print off the form to take to your family physician or mental health professional.

IDENTIFYING CHILDHOOD CLINICAL DEPRESSION

Courtesy of: Waterman & Associates, Nanaimo, BC

i) Change In Mood:

- Irritability
- Aggressiveness
- Tearfulness
- Loss of Interest in daily activities
- Fears
- Decrease in concentration
- Increase in the guilty feelings
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Low self-esteem
- Recurrent thoughts of death
- Suicidal thoughts with or without a plan
- Attempt to commit self-harm

ii) Change In Behaviour:

- Fidgetiness
- Slower in accomplishing things
- Lying
- Stealing
- Bullying others
- Temper tantrums
- Habits such as nail biting or chewing on clothes
- Tics
- Boredom
- Change in normal activities
- Self-mutilation
- Non compliance with commands
- Requires multiple reminders
- Stays in her/his room most of the time
- Excessive masturbation
- Giving away favorite toys/items

iii) Change In Eating:

- Increase in appetite
- Decrease in appetite
- Increased weight
- Decreased weight
- Expresses she/he is fat when it's not true
- Change in behaviour surrounding meal times

iv) Change In Sleeping:

- _____ Hard time getting to sleep
- _____ Frequently awakens throughout the night
- _____ Nightmares
- _____ Begins sleepwalking
- _____ Early morning awakenings
- _____ Hard to awaken in the morning
- _____ Insomnia
- _____ Frequent naps
- _____ Wants to or begins sleeping in parent's bed

v) Change In Elimination Patterns:

- _____ New onset of bed-wetting (enuresis)
- _____ Daytime wetting
- _____ New onset of fecal soiling (encopresis)
- _____ Constipation
- _____ Diarrhea

vi) Change In School Behaviour:

- _____ Increased absences
- _____ Resistance to going to school
- _____ Increased tardiness
- _____ Noncompliance with school rules
- _____ Decides doesn't like teacher for no good reason
- _____ Fails to hand in homework
- _____ Refuses to do schoolwork
- _____ Decrease in grades
- _____ Falling asleep in school
- _____ Increased physical complaints
- _____ More trips to the nurses office
- _____ Becomes target of teasing
- _____ Becomes victim of bullies
- _____ Bullies classmates
- _____ No best friend
- _____ Left out of peers social functions such as Birthday parties

vii) Change In Health:

- _____ Increase in health problems
- _____ Chronic Illness
- _____ Headaches
- _____ Stomach aches
- _____ Chest pain
- _____ Dizziness
- _____ Joint aches

- _____ Urinary tract infections
- _____ Taking non-prescribed medication
- _____ Takes excessive over-the-counter medications
- _____ Auditory hallucinations (hears voices, sounds etc)

viii) Change In The Family:

- _____ Parental fighting
- _____ Separation
- _____ Divorce
- _____ New marriage
- _____ New sibling
- _____ Sibling with behaviour problems
- _____ Family member with a new serious medical diagnosis
- _____ Family member with a chronic illness
- _____ Family member diagnosed or hospitalized for mental health problems
- _____ Death of a family member
- _____ Parental loss of employment
- _____ Family financial loss

ix) Other variables:

- _____ Best friend moves away
- _____ Classmate diagnosed with serious illness
- _____ Classmate in a serious accident
- _____ Classmate commits suicide
- _____ Classmate dies of illness
- _____ Classmate killed in accident
- _____ Changes in teacher
- _____ Teacher becomes ill
- _____ Teacher dies

Remember, just because your child has some of these symptoms or may have exhibited some of the symptoms over an extended period of time does not necessarily mean your child is clinically depressed. However, if you are unsure after completing this list, it may be worthwhile talking to your family doctor or a mental health professional.

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