



## Home and Family Strategies: Depression

*This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of child depression and should be used in consultation and collaboration with mental health personnel or as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain only a portion of many possible strategies available to address symptoms of depression. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with careful consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health diagnoses should be made only by a trained mental health professional after a thorough evaluation.*

If you notice a significant change in mood in your child that lasts for more than a week or two, share your observations with the child's pediatrician and/or school's mental health support team

### Strategies for Depressed or Irritable Mood

- Identify one family member or friend to act as your child's check in person and as a point person for family communication
- Provide built-in opportunities for your child to talk with a supportive adult who has the time and ability to listen attentively
- Validate your child's experience and feelings ("I know that things are really hard for you right now")
- Provide your child with opportunities for "self time out" to regroup when s/he is feeling excessively sad or irritable
- Teach your children to identify their mood patterns and appropriate ways to communicate anger, frustration, sadness, etc.
- Help your child to identify automatic negative thoughts and strategies for reframing these negative thoughts; encourage positive self talk

### Strategies for Motor Restlessness

- Integrate physical activity (i.e. walking the dog, shooting hoops) throughout the evenings and on weekends, and participate if possible; generally, provide opportunities for your child to be active within the house/yard/neighborhood
- Provide your child with outlets for physical restlessness, such as stress or yoga balls, rocking chairs, or standing while completing homework or other tasks

### Strategies for Slowed Psycho-Motor Responses

- Provide your child with written copies of household chores and/or expectations
- Allow reminders and flexible deadlines for project/chore completion
- Avoid correcting your child for non-academic reasons such as messy work when s/he is completing homework
- Allow child more time to respond when asking questions or making requests

### Strategies for Feelings of Worthlessness and/or Excessive Guilt

- Model that it is okay to make mistakes; point out and make light of your own mistakes
- Model how to reframe mistakes into opportunities
- Provide your child with additional, meaningful responsibilities
- Discourage children from participating in activities that result in increased negative feelings about themselves
- Demonstrate unconditional acceptance of your child (although not his or her behavior if it is inappropriate)
- Separate child from siblings or peers who are negative or who frequently point out the failings of others

### Strategies for Changes in Appetite

- Collaborate closely with your child's pediatrician and school nurse.
- Monitor child's eating, but do not become a food gatekeeper
- Allow healthy "grazing" throughout the day/evening
- Provide opportunities for physical activity throughout the week



### Strategies for Fatigue or Loss of Energy

- Coordinate with your child's pediatrician, the school nurse, and your child's teachers to allow healthy grazing on foods that may increase your child's energy
- Encourage outdoor activities where children can benefit from the effects of sunlight and exercise.
- Provide your child with sensory-stimulating tools such as a stress or yoga ball and encourage frequent motor breaks
- Allow your child to self-select a household chore/role of high interest (i.e. helping with errands, computer tasks, baking or cooking)
- Incorporate physical activity throughout the week (i.e. urge your child to walk, bike, or skateboard and to engage in physical activity with friends)
- Reduce household chores and/or allow more time for their completion
- Allow the child more time to respond to family conversations and activities
- Provide your child with an opportunity for a short rest or nap period if s/he is struggling to stay awake and if it does not interfere with the child's ability to sleep at night
- Identify child's interests and preferred activities and try to incorporate them into his/her daily schedule
- Ask your child's school team to consider allowing your child to demonstrate his or her learning and knowledge through alternative methods

### Strategies for Diminished Interest in Usual Activities

- Identify the child's typical interests and/or favorite activities; integrate them into the child's home routine
- Gently encourage your child to participate in activities with friends/peers who have been a positive part of their life; do not force social interaction or participation in activities
- Encourage similar-age family members/peers to invite your child to participate in weekend and extra-curricular activities
- Allow your child to attend group activities without requiring active participation
- Give your child opportunities to help their siblings and peers in areas in which they excel or to make important decisions about family or play activities
- Initiate conversations with your children upon their return home from high-interest activities/outings

### Strategies for Difficulty with Concentration or Decision-Making

- Provide expectations/requests in writing when possible
- Prompt your child to use a day planner to keep track of homework; provide support at home each night to make sure the child understands assignments and has all necessary materials
- Provide your child with a self-selected homework space where s/he can feel focused and productive
- Help your child organize projects and break down projects/assignments into manageable parts
- Help child to develop short term goals, even one morning or day at a time, to help them feel that life is more manageable
- Ask your child's school team to provide preferential seating based on academic and emotional needs

### Suicidal Ideation

There are some signs that may indicate overt suicidal crisis and should be acted upon **immediately** by engaging your community's mental health crisis team. Call First Call at 488-7777 or dial 9-1-1 if you notice any of these signs:

- Threats or attempts to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for the means (e.g. gun, pills, rope) to kill oneself
- Making final arrangements such as writing a will or a farewell letter or giving away cherished belongings
- Pre-occupation with suicide or dying (often expressed through writing, art, music, online forums like facebook) in conjunction with depression symptoms or high risk behavior
- Showing sudden improvement after a period of extreme sadness and/or withdrawal