

SADNESS VS. DEPRESSION IN KIDS

by Kristin J. Carothers, PhD an expert in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and behavioral interventions.

	SADNESS	DEPRESSION
What is it?	<p>Temporary feelings of sadness that are an appropriate response to what’s going on.</p> <p>These feelings don’t happen often and don’t interfere with activities at home, in school, and with friends.</p> <p>Typical sadness usually passes quickly on its own or with a little reassurance from caring adults or friends.</p> <p>Kids who learn and think differently may have more reasons to feel sad than other kids, like failing a spelling test after they studied all the words.</p>	<p>Frequent and intense feelings of sadness that are out of proportion to what’s going on.</p> <p>These feelings happen often and make it hard to function at home, in school, and with friends.</p> <p>Depression is not a passing mood. It tends to include feeling hopeless and worthless.</p> <p>Kids who are feeling so down that they have trouble functioning for two weeks or more may need to be treated for depression.</p>
What can it look like?	<p>Kids get sad about specific things. They may say things like “I wish I didn’t have to take these stupid tests!”</p> <p>Their negative feelings may make them reluctant to do something optional like go to a party. But their feelings don’t get in the way of commitments like playing on a sports team.</p> <p>Kids who are sad may cry or throw a temper tantrum. But they typically don’t experience significant distress or have meltdowns.</p>	<p>Kids seem sad or angry all the time. They may say things like “I wish I was never born!”</p> <p>Their negative feelings may lead them to refuse to go to school, avoid social situations, and withdraw from activities they used to enjoy.</p> <p>Physical symptoms may include: •Crying a lot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating too little or too much • Sleeping too little or too much • Trouble focusing • Stomachaches or headaches that don’t respond to treatment

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How professionals can help	There’s no need for professional help for negative feelings that are temporary, that are appropriate to the situation, and that don’t happen often.	There are many types of emotional help available for kids with depression. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help kids look at negative thoughts and replace them with positive thinking. Professionals might also recommend antidepressant medication. Research shows the best way to treat depression in kids is a combination of CBT and medication.
What schools can do	<p>How kids behave in school and how they interact with other students can say a lot about their emotional state.</p> <p>Teachers can help by letting you know if your child is doing worse academically, is withdrawn, sad, or tired, or has a negative attitude.</p> <p>If that’s what your child’s teacher reports, you may want to request a meeting with your child’s resource team.</p>	<p>Teachers can be sensitive to kids’ challenges and provide school supports that help reduce stress.</p> <p>For instance, if your child has trouble reading, the teacher could agree to not ask your child to read aloud.</p> <p>Other supports include breaking assignments into smaller pieces and pairing your child with kids who express interest in helping.</p>
What you can do	<p>Get familiar with signs of depression at different ages. Take notes on what you’re seeing, and share your concerns with your child’s health care provider.</p> <p>Take your child’s concerns seriously but express confidence in your child’s ability to manage them.</p> <p>Remind your child of past successes and strategies that worked in those situations. Brainstorm new strategies and practice them.</p>	<p>Talk openly with your child about depression in a supportive, nonjudgmental way. Ask about your child’s perspective and share your own experiences.</p> <p>Seek treatment for your child’s depression, and be supportive as your child develops new coping strategies. Help practice new techniques learned in therapy. Seek help yourself.</p>