

CHILDREN EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION TOO

October is Depression Screening month. Earlier Valley Mental Health talked about adult depression. Like depression in adults, childhood depression can result in: 1) sadness and hopelessness; 2) low self-esteem; 3) lack of energy and 4) it can make it difficult to find joy or interest in anything, 5) disruption in sleep; 6) difficult concentrating, and 7) have thoughts of suicide.

It is important to understand childhood Depression is no one's fault and it can be treated. Adults in a child's life play an important role and can make a big difference in helping a child enjoy a healthier, happier life.

The cause of childhood depression is not known. Scientists think a combination of environment, brain chemistry and genetics are probably responsible.

Unlike depression in adults, children often show depression through behavior change, not words:

- Lack of interest in favorite activities: hobbies, eating less, not wanting to play with friends
- Doing worse in school
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Irritability
- Hostile or aggressive behavior

Symptoms may differ by age groups:

Preschoolers may: have less interest in play; become irritable more often and have frequent aches and pains.

School-age children may: have problems with friends and in school; worry too much and fight with parents and peers.

Preteens may: avoid family and friends; develop eating disorders; have more aggression and engage in risky behaviors, such as using alcohol and do other drugs.

Treatment and How Parents Can Help:

- Diagnosis and treatment should be done with the children's health-care provider (a physical exam) and a mental health provider
- Treatment may include: individual/family therapy, and medications
- Involve your child in healthy activities
- Talk to your child often and LISTEN
- Give your child a balanced view – accept your child's feelings but encourage a realistic view of things
- Be alert to stressful events that can trigger depression (deaths, beginning of school, moves, divorce, changes in family and household).