

# GRIEVING CHILDREN WITH DEPRESSION

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*Children as young as age five years have attempted suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in teens and the sixth leading cause of death for 5-to-14-year-olds. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) depression is the leading factor for suicide. Depression is a serious illness but it can be treated. Children exhibit different behaviors than adults when they are depressed. Learn what the signs of depression are in children. Seek professional help.*



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1. **Children who have depression sometimes show the following symptoms:** prolonged withdrawal, apathy, sustained acting out of anger, denial the death happened, crying spells, rejection of living people, guilt and shame.
2. **Depressed mood:** Children's moods may fluctuate. They can be seen as being irritable or not paying attention to adults. The grieving child may tune out things in which they normally held an interest. They may end up watching lots of television or escaping through reading books.
3. **Diminished interest in most activities:** A depressed child may stop wanting to play with friends and declare that he or she is bored. Games or activities that were once fun may no longer hold the child's interest. Basically, a depressed child may have extremely low or high energy levels.
4. **Weight changes:** Check the child's weight and compare it to two months ago. If the child is overeating or has failed to make age appropriate expected weight gains, take note.
5. **Insomnia or hypersomnia:** If a child is having difficulties sleeping through the night or is afraid to go to sleep for fear of bad dreams, it could be a sign of depression - especially if it goes on for more than a few nights. On the other hand, sleeping too much or not wanting to get out of bed every day is another symptom of depression.
6. **Psychomotor or change in physical movements:** Caregivers of children know the normal activity level of the children in their care. If the normal activity level changes (if the child is either wound up all the time or unmotivated more than usual) do not think it is just a phase.
7. **Feelings of guilt, worthless and low self-esteem:** Listen to how the grieving child talks about him or herself and their interactions with other people. Watch for words that mean "I feel guilty", "I am horrible", "No one likes me so who cares", "So What?" or "What does it matter?"
8. **Cannot concentrate or think:** Grieving people and family close to the child may not see that a child is not thinking clearly. Some warning signs may include a drop in school performance, coordination difficulties in sports, troubles playing a musical instrument, the inability to memorize or remember things. In fact, some children react to grief and depression by skipping school all together.
9. **Thoughts of death:** Prolonged thoughts of death (longer than two months) are not normal. Beware of talk of suicide or how people might kill themselves. Kids might say something like, "Maybe I shouldn't be around". Take these comments seriously!!!
10. **Self-destructive or hostile behavior:** Anger for children can come out in behavior harmful to themselves or other people around them. Hitting, throwing, screaming, pinching or anything destructive is extremely serious. Do not think this is a phase they will get over soon.
11. **Being sick:** Depressed kids sometimes are sick kids: Frequent tummy aches and headaches are common symptoms of depression in children.
12. **Rejection becomes a problem:** The slightest rejection or failure may send a depressed child right over the edge. Do not ignore. Extra attention should be given to children who are grieving and /or depressed.