

## Is it Depression, Winter Blues, or a Passing Phase?

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Childhood is supposed to be a happy and care-free time of life but for children suffering from depression, it is really miserable. Some children (and adults) suffer from “winter blues” due in part to shorter days, less sunlight, and colder weather. More severe cases of “winter blues” are sometimes called Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. It is basically depression that starts in the fall and ends in the spring each year. Not to be confused with an occasional low mood day, depression is experienced for at least two weeks before it can be diagnosed.

According to NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)), about 2% of school age children and 8% of adolescents meet the criteria for major depression on any given day. Over the long term, one in five teens experiences depression. Symptoms include sadness, irritability, sleeping too much or insomnia, eating too much or too little, and lack of energy and/or focus. When children feel this way, they can have a hard time getting up for school in the morning or going to sleep at a reasonable time. Boys and girls are equally affected by depression, but once reaching puberty, girls’ rate of depression is double that of boys. Also, children and teens with chronic illnesses have a much higher rate of depression than those without other health problems.

What can parents do to help their children become happy again?

- Listen compassionately without judgment – your child may not have the energy to complete homework and chores and an angry response only makes the depression worse by reinforcing their feelings of inadequacy
- Understand depression – sometimes the bad attitude isn’t your child’s, it comes from the depression – try not to take their bad attitude personally
- More exercise – exercise produces endorphins that make people feel happier – find something that makes the child move his body and encourage and support him
- Seek professional help – if there is a brain chemical imbalance, medication may be necessary and/or talk therapy may help
- Take care of yourself – caring for a depressed child is exhausting – remember to get the right emotional support for yourself and maintain healthy eating, sleeping, and exercising habits

If childhood depression is left untreated, it will likely continue into adulthood. A few low mood days of sadness here and there are completely normal, but once the sadness or irritability continues for more than two weeks, take action. Untreated depression can lead to self-destructive behaviors like drug and alcohol use and even suicide. When children and teens are depressed, they are suffering. Learning to overcome difficulties in life can build strength and character, but depression makes kids feel helpless and hopeless. Treating the depression empowers them to see solutions to their difficulties and allows them to feel the energy needed to tackle their problems.

CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services Family Action counseling offers talk therapy for school age youth 6-17 exhibiting behaviors consistent with the winter blues. Defiant behavior, irritability, running

away, and cutting school can be signs of depression & low self-esteem. To find out if CDS counseling can help your child, please call 352 244 0628 x3822. [www.cdsfl.org](http://www.cdsfl.org)