

Healthy Living

Identifying Childhood Depression

Did you know that pre-schoolers are among the fastest-growing age bracket to which antidepressants are being marketed, according to studies published in “Psychiatric Services”? Researchers estimate that more than a million young children are clinically depressed.

Depression is an illness that affects millions of adults but does not discriminate by age. Children can be just as likely to develop the condition, especially if there is a genetic component, meaning depression runs in the family.

The symptoms of depression may be different in children than in adults. This coupled with a child’s inability to sometimes express what he or she is feeling can make diagnosing childhood depression more difficult. Signs include, but are not limited to, rage, irritability, bed-wetting, and physical complaints, such as stomach aches, dizziness and headaches.

Depression is a broad term that covers a few different clinical disorders. Children most often experience “reactive depression,” or the blues brought on by a change in circumstance or loss. Divorce, moving or attending a new school can induce this form of depression.

Children also may experience dysthymia, also known as low-grade depression. Counseling and treatment with medication for the short-term can help.

Major depression is less likely in children, but teenagers may suffer from it. In fact, research indicates that dabbling with drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin during the teen years is often a way to self-medicate and alleviate depression symptoms. However, it can simply make matters worse.

Manic depression, also known as bi-polar disorder, can occur in children primarily if it runs in the family. If you or a relative has bi-polar disorder and your child is exhibiting symptoms of extreme highs and lows in behavior, see a doctor promptly for treatment.

Depression is a treatable illness, provided steps are taken to promptly identify and treat the condition. Most psychiatric experts agree that a combination of medication and counseling is the key to dealing with depression.