

Helping Your Child through Depression

The holiday season can be a wonderful time of the year but it can also present unique challenges when your child is ill. Well-meaning family and friends may have unrealistic expectations of your family that can contribute to excess stress. Your child may also be affected by the bombardment of media images depicting perfect families celebrating in perfect homes. As adults we know these images are meant to sell products but children may not understand this.

The Home Instruction family realizes that your child is coping with illness and is adjusting to being away from their school, regularly scheduled activities and friends. Here are some tips to help you assist your child:

1. Pay attention to your child's feelings and take them seriously.
2. Try not to judge or compare h/her to others.
3. Praise both large and small accomplishments.
4. Modify your expectations. Be patient.
5. Remain calm when h/she becomes anxious or irritable.
6. Encourage physical activity as much as your child is able.
7. Encourage social engagement to prevent feelings of isolation.
8. Remain involved in your child's treatment. Keep track of changes in mood and inform the doctor if signs of depression worsen.
9. Educate yourself about depression. Utilize on-line resources and your public library.
10. Seek out help if you are feeling overwhelmed. Caretaking is a very difficult job!
11. Be open with family members so that they can support your family in ways that are helpful to you.
12. Provide your child with enrichment activities that will help replace some of the regularly scheduled activities that your child may not be able to currently participate in.
13. Monitor your child's on-line usage to ascertain if they are visiting dangerous sites.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression:

- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- Expressions of irritability, hostility or anger.
- Withdrawal from loved ones and friends.
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits.
- Restlessness
- Feelings of sadness, guilt, hopelessness and worthlessness.
- Thoughts of suicide or death.
- Use of alcohol and/ or drugs

Suicide Warning Signs:

- Seeking out ways to kill him/herself –attempts to gather medicine, procure a weapon...
- Giving away possessions
- Romanticizing dying
- Expressing suicidal ideation such as, “I wish I wasn’t here”, “I’d be better off dead,” No one will miss me.”
- Engaging in dangerous behavior(s)
- Discussing a suicide plan, a time frame and possibly having the means to carry it out.
- Calling or saying goodbye to people

If your child is expressing any of the above signs take it seriously and seek out immediate help from h/her mental health provider or from your local hospital’s psychiatric emergency room.

We have provided a student version of this article that you can read and discuss together with your child which can be accessed under the Student’s portal section of this website.

Other resources: Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK The Samaritans 1-212-673-3000

On behalf of the Home Instruction Schools team we wish you and your family a healthy, safe and enjoyable holiday season!