

What You Need to Know...



Mood Disorders

Know the Facts

- Depression is a mental health problem that affects people of all ages, including children. Depression is more than just "feeling blue" or having a bad day, and it is different from the feelings of grief or sorrow that might follow a major loss, such as a death in the family. It is not a personal weakness or a character flaw. Children with clinical depression cannot simply "snap out of it." As many as one in every 33 children-and 1 in 8 adolescents-may have depression.
- No one thing causes depression. Biological, environmental, and psychological factors occurring individually or in combination seem to contribute to the onset of the disorder. Children who develop depression are likely to have a family history of the disorder. Children who have a chronic illness or who experience abuse, neglect, or other trauma are also at a higher risk for depression. Depression in children often co-occurs with other mental disorders such as anxiety disorders or disruptive behavior disorders. Adolescents who are depressed are also at risk for substance abuse.
- Consequences of depression can include social isolation, academic underachievement, and strained family interactions. Depression in children is also associated with an increased risk for suicidal behaviors.
- Once a young person has experienced an episode of depression, he or she is at an increased risk for developing another episode of depression within the next 5 years. Children who experience a depressive episode are 5 times more likely to have depression as an adult, and depression in childhood may predict a more severe depressive illness in adulthood.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression, is a less frequent, but serious mental illness. It is a mental disorder marked by extreme changes in mood, energy levels and behavior. Until recently, a diagnosis of the disorder was rarely made in childhood. Doctors now recognize and treat bipolar disorder in children and adolescents. Symptoms may begin in early childhood, though more typically they emerge in adolescence or adulthood.

Up to one-third of the 3.4 million children and adolescents with depression in the United States may actually be experiencing the early onset of bipolar disorder. However, the illness looks different in children than it does in adults. Children with bipolar disorder typically alternate rapidly between mania (high energy) and depression. These rapid mood shifts may take the form of irritability followed by withdrawal with few clear periods of wellness between episodes.

Know the Signs

Depression

- ❑ Persistent sadness and hopelessness
- ❑ Withdrawal from friends and activities
- ❑ Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- ❑ Frequent physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches
- ❑ Lack of enthusiasm or motivation
- ❑ Decreased energy level
- ❑ Indecision or inability to concentrate
- ❑ Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- ❑ Play that involves excessive aggression toward self and/or others or that involves persistently sad themes
- ❑ Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

Bipolar Disorder

- ❑ A persistent irritable mood
- ❑ Strong and frequent cravings, often for carbohydrates and sweets
- ❑ Excessive involvement in multiple projects and activities
- ❑ Impaired judgment, impulsivity, racing thoughts, and pressure to keep talking
- ❑ Grandiose belief in own abilities (ability to fly, for example)
- ❑ Many teens with mood disorders abuse alcohol and drugs
- ❑ Dare-devil behaviors
- ❑ Depression
- ❑ Delusions and hallucinations
- ❑ Sleeping little or sleeping too much
- ❑ Defiance of authority
- ❑ Increased irritability or agitation
- ❑ Rapidly changing moods lasting a few hours to a few days
- ❑ Explosive, lengthy, and often destructive rages
- ❑ Hyperactivity, agitation, and distractibility

Any child or adolescent who abuses substances should be evaluated for a mood disorder. If addiction develops, it is essential to treat both the mental illness and the substance abuse at the same time.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.