

# HOW TO SPOT A DEPRESSED CHILD

*The key thing to watch for is drastic changes in teen behavior. Other red flags to consider:*

- **DIFFICULTY MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS** May become antisocial, reject friends or refuse to take part in school and family events
- **REDUCED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** May suffer from lethargy or appear to drag self around
- **MORBID OR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS** May seek out games, music, art or books with death-related themes
- **LOW SELF-ESTEEM** May feel that they are worthless and that their peers, teachers and family disapprove of them
- **SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR** May harm their body by, for example, biting fingernails to the point of bleeding
- **PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL** Grades may drop or classroom troublemaking rise
- **CHANGES IN SLEEP PATTERNS** May either have restless nights or sleep away the day

## Preschoolers

- Frequent unexplained stomachaches, headaches or fatigue
- Overactivity or excessive restlessness
- A sad appearance
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Irritability
- Loss of pleasure in activities
- Tendency to portray the world as bleak

## GRIEF

If I am to grieve,  
it is my privilege,  
my right,  
my choice.  
my human way.

Do not take  
that from me.  
It is what I am,  
sometimes,  
called to do.

In my hour  
of discomfort,  
touch me,  
hold me,  
comfort me  
with your gentle  
words and gestures,  
let me know of your  
presence and nurturing spirit,  
but do not hold me back.

Though you cannot  
totally relate to  
my displeasure,  
know that I must release  
not in agony,  
but break apart the pieces  
and will, again,  
emerge renewed  
and stronger  
than before.

Grieving  
is God's way of  
house cleaning.

things to do to prevent depression.

1. Admit negative feelings like anger. The ideal is to be able to share them when they happen. Counseling may help you learn how.
2. Let your feelings out in a nonthreatening way. A boy who is feeling sad yet is embarrassed to cry might go to the movies, really get into the story and allow himself to experience his pent-up emotions through the tearful scenes in the film.
3. Learn to state your feelings in effective ways. It's no help to begin with, "The trouble with you...." Instead of saying to your parents, "You never listen to me," try, "I need you to listen to me *now* before I do something I don't really want to do."
4. Keep a journal. It helps you remember and track what you are feeling; it gives you practice in saying what's going on inside you. It gets the dark clouds out of your mind and onto the paper.
5. Build good self-esteem by doing things that make you feel competent. You could choose to make a short-term goal for yourself. (Make that two or three when you feel able.) For instance, finishing your math homework by eight p.m. can give you a sense of accomplishment.
6. Maintain meaningful relationships with friends, family and God.
7. Get in some physical exercise several times a week. Studies have shown that daily aerobic exercise can lessen and even prevent depression.
8. Be aware of the "danger" times: *changes in your life* (physical growth, illness, injury, promotion to a new class, different schedule); *loss* (death or divorce in family, a friend's move, a romantic breakup); or *extra stress* (arguments at home, tough classload, parent out of work).
9. If you know you are in a situation where you are vulnerable, like a move to a new school or city, take steps to keep up old friendships. Write letters, use the phone when it's possible, plan a reunion.
10. Talk to adults who can understand without judging you. It's a good idea to include such a person in your life when you're not depressed, so that the lines of communication will be open in a crisis. And an adult may have more power, more "connections" for helping you than even your best friend can offer.