

# Positive Techniques to Counter Depressed Thoughts and Emotions in Children

October happens to be National Depression Awareness Month. Depression is often thought of as an adult illness and not always recognized when it affects children. However, depression does occur fairly often in young people and can manifest itself in ways which inhibit their ability to enjoy life. About one in five teens will experience depression at some point. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that approximately 11 percent of adolescents have a depressive disorder by age 18. Recognizing the symptoms is the first step in helping a depressed child or adolescent.

## Getting the Right Start

### STUDENT GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH

#### KNOW THE 10 COMMON WARNING SIGNS



- 1 Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- 2 Seriously trying to harm or kill oneself or making plans to do so
- 3 Severe out-of-control, risk-taking behaviors
- 4 Sudden, overwhelming fear for no reason
- 5 Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight; significant weight loss or weight gain
- 6 Seeing, hearing or believing things that are not real
- 7 Repeatedly using drugs or alcohol
- 8 Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality or sleeping habits
- 9 Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still
- 10 Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

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When dealing with concerns of depression, it is important to create a network of support among family, friends, and health-care providers. Self-care behaviors are a vital part of treatment, including healthy eating and sleeping patterns, increasing physical activity, socializing with others, and personal hygiene. Symptoms of depression among teens can develop from various triggers, such as issues of bullying, excessive use of technology, low physical activity, and experimental substance use. There is a positive impact from educating children and adolescents on how to implement mindfulness exercises and grounding techniques in order to gain more control of their emotions. Mindfulness coping skills bring awareness to at least one of the five senses of the body and tends to help balance both sides of the brain.

The right side of the brain is the creative and emotional side that is responsible for tasks like intuition, art, music, and imagination. The left side of the brain is responsible for logical thought, language, science and math, reasoning, etc. When children become overemotional they are often using too much of the right side of

our brain and therefore do not tend to make logical and healthy decisions. Utilizing coping skills that activate our senses helps to slow down the body, balance the brain, and gain more control of our emotions.

Trained counselors can help clients elevate their moods by utilizing mindfulness skills, including progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and positive imagery. In addition, children also have benefitted from the arts. An example may be to mindfully listen to music and pick out each instrument in the song. Humans can connect with their sense of touch, smell, and hearing by drawing, painting, or sculpting. Other examples of mindfulness activities could include identifying sounds in your environment, mindfully tasting a citrus fruit, squeezing a stress ball, or mindfully doing a daily task. Parents can be supportive to children by reminding them to train their brains to think positively and surround themselves with items that can enhance a happier mood. Parents can use Mindfulness Apps on their phones to encourage their children to learn and practice guided meditation and relaxation exercises, such as “Stop, Breathe, and Think” and “Calm.

[Shawn Achor](#), author and speaker known for his advocacy of positive psychology, discovered that maintaining a positive brain produces higher levels of creativity, productivity, intelligence, and energy levels compared to a negative, neutral, or stressed brain. His research found that increasing positive thinking turns on the learning centers of the brain and produces feelings of happiness.

Parents can assist teens to promote positivity by creating a collage to hang in their room that is full of bright colors, inspirational quotes, or calming pictures to help maintain a more elevated mood. Mindfulness exercises and strength-based interventions help overcome struggles of depression in a more hopeful and positive way.

**LIVE WELL**

- ☀ Remember that you have control over living well
- ☀ Find a routine that works for you that includes a healthy diet, exercise and regular sleep patterns
- ☀ Stay close to your support network. Engage family, friends, teammates and your faith community. Think about joining an online community
- ☀ Be realistic and mindful of your needs and know your limits

**GETTING THROUGH IT**

- > Try staying away from drugs and alcohol. This is not always easy, so find strategies that work. Using drugs or alcohol to feel better is harmful to you.
- > If you use alcohol or drugs, be honest and tell your therapist or doctor because it affects your care plan.
- > Stay positive. Surround yourself with positive messages, people and activities. This will help you to feel better.

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