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## Depression

**Watch your child for signs of depression. Get help if you think he's depressed.**

People used to think that only adults got depressed.  
But depression also happens in children and teenagers.

### What causes depression

- Big life changes (like the death of a loved one, a divorce or breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend)
- Stress
- Being sick for a very long time

Children have a greater chance of becoming depressed if:

- Someone in their family had depression
- One of their parents has been depressed



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### Signs of depression

Children show many of the same signs of depression as adults.

#### Feelings and thoughts

- Sadness that won't go away
- Little hope for the future
- Low self-esteem
- Feeling like a failure
- Getting easily annoyed, irritated, or angry
- Feeling like no one understands them
- (For young children) Worrying a lot about their families. They may also worry that their parents will die.

#### Changes in how they act

- Changes in eating, like eating more, or eating less. Both can show up in depressed children.
- Changes in sleeping
  - Going to bed later than usual
  - Sleeping later than usual

- Waking up earlier than usual
- Waking up in the middle of the night
- Sleeping for a long time during the day
- Not taking care of themselves (like brushing their teeth or taking showers)
- Getting into trouble at school
- Staying home from school more
  - Young children may pretend to be sick so they don't have to go to school.
- Showing less interest in friends at school and in the neighborhood

### Problems with their bodies

- Not having enough energy
- Complaining of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems

### **Does depression look the same in deaf children as in hearing children?**

Many things are the same when a deaf child is depressed.

However, deaf children may not know about "depression":

- They don't know how to sign or talk about their feelings to their family and friends.
- They may not know the words to describe their feelings.
- They usually have not heard much about depression in the family or community.

They may have strong, bad feelings, like feeling disappointed in themselves and their lives, feeling ugly, or feeling like a failure. But they don't know that these bad feelings come together and have a name.

This means that they often show how they feel by acting out:

- Becoming upset
- Becoming aggressive
- Becoming grouchy
- Withdrawing or "sulking"

Feeling bad in this way, without knowing why or what it is, is like living with a bad headache that won't go away. Sometimes you have the headache for so long that you don't even realize that it makes you feel bad.

### **Hearing teens learn more and talk more about depression**

Hearing children gets lots of chances to talk about how they feel:

- They can talk with their friends easily.
- They can write in journals.
- They can listen to tapes and the radio.
- They can read books with stories that talk about teen depression.

Deaf teens may not get all of the same information.

### **Teens with progressive or fluctuating hearing loss also get depressed**

Some children's hearing loss changes. This is called **fluctuating (FLUK-chew-ate-ing)** hearing loss. Other children have hearing loss that gets worse over time. This is called **progressive (pro-GRESS-iv)** hearing loss. These children can get depressed, too.

- For children with fluctuating hearing loss, their hearing loss can change often. One day they wake up and they can hear their teachers.  
But the next day, they can't understand what their teachers are saying.
  - Because of this, many deaf children feel that there's something wrong with them. They don't know their hearing loss has changed.

### **Can changes in hormones look like depression?**

Yes. As teenagers grow, their bodies make a lot of chemicals called **hormones**. The hormones help their bodies change and grow. Teenagers can have big changes in how much or what kinds of hormones they have. This can make them moody.

Girls have a lot of hormone changes around the time of their periods. That's why the week before their periods can be really tough (for you and for them).

But if your child gets very irritable around the time of her period, talk to a doctor about it. If the irritability gets in the way of the rest of her life, the doctor may give her medicines that may help.

### **What deaf teenagers think about depression**

Here's what some deaf teenagers said about what depression is.

For some, not being able to communicate is the same as depression:

- "Depression means when you feel really depressed. Like when your family is speaking and you don't know what's going on."
- "It's when you don't understand your parents when they try to sign."
- "Depression is when you feel sad inside and when you feel lonely."
- "Depression is feeling frustrated, angry, irritated."
- "When you go to the store and try to write things down on paper but nobody understands what you're writing. That's depression."
- "Depression is hard. I feel stuck and I can't express my feelings."

*Last updated: June 21, 2004*

*You can find this page online at:*

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/index.jsp>