

## Matching Assistance Depression



### Depression among children and teens in foster care.

-Depression may be a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Children and teenagers who are in foster care have been through some tough situations, and this has a lasting impact on their emotional development. Many of them have experienced grief and loss.

-Helping your child learn how to identify their feelings, understand where they are coming from, and how to manage them are all important ways to help them build emotional skills.

-Depression is visible in many different ways, including withdrawing from others, being quiet, or having angry outbursts. However, just because a child is quiet does not mean that he/she is depressed; this could just be who they are. Depression affects girls and boys equally.

-Depression is often associated with feelings of not being wanted, uncertainty and worthlessness. It can also occur along with other disorders, like Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder.

-It is also often associated with a lack of energy, insomnia, lack of interest in activities that normally brought pleasure, and an increase in sleeping.

### Child development and depression.

A child's developmental level will effect how he/she copes with loss and how they understand the situation. The effects of loss can begin as early as infancy and occur all the way through adulthood. The following is a description of how grief and loss can affect the child throughout the developmental stages, and how you as their foster parent can help them.

#### Infancy:

-During this stage in development, the infant's task is to establish trust with a caregiver. When an infant experiences a loss of a caregiver, their trust in adults can be disrupted. Behaviors can include withdrawal, crying loudly, and apathy. Foster parents can help the infant reduce their experience of loss by trying to maintain a consistent routine.

#### Preschool (2-5 years):

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Experts reason that depression among adopted children may be rooted in feelings of rejection and abandonment felt by the adoptee, perhaps even before birth. These clinicians believe that the unborn fetus may be able to develop feelings of abandonment in utero as early as the second trimester of pregnancy.

It is important to know and be able to identify the symptoms of depression in child adoptees. In very young children, depression symptoms may be hard to identify, but can take the form of eating or sleeping problems, attachment issues, separation anxiety, social withdrawal or failure to thrive.

School-aged children may have problems with schoolwork, fatigue, difficulty focusing or lack of motivation. Adolescents may become socially withdrawn, oversleep, abuse substances or act in self-destructive ways.

### Follow-up Links

[Kids Health](#)  
[Troubled Teen 101](#)  
[Childhood Depression](#)

-At this age, children have not developed an understanding of cause and effect, or logical thinking abilities. They also do not have a good understanding of permanence. Children at this age may experience sadness, hopelessness, fearfulness, denial and guilt. Behaviors include being clingy, anxious or stubborn. Foster parents can help the child by answering the child's questions, providing a loving and stable environment, and patiently attempt to connect with the child.

School age (6-11 years):

-At this age, children have now developed an understanding of cause, effect, and permanency and are able to think logically. Behaviors include school problems, a fear of losing a caregiver, learning problems, and a fear of loss in general. Foster parents can help children at this age by being sympathetic listeners, and providing a stable and loving environment.

Adolescence (12-19 years):

-At this age, teenagers will experience loss and grief like an adult would, and will go through the five stages of grief and loss. Complicating this process is the teenagers development of an identity. At this age, adolescents are trying to figure out who they are as a person, and a loss can further complicate this process. Behaviors include eating disorders, use of substances, acting out, etc. Foster parents can help adolescents at this age by helping them maintain a sense of identity, allowing them to make non-harmful choices, and encouraging expressions of independence and freedom.

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## Treatment of depression.

Talk therapy is the most beneficial treatment of depression, especially for children and adolescents. Many antidepressant medications are not approved for use in teenagers and adolescents, and as such should only be used as a last resort. Talk therapy is the best solution because it allows children and adolescents to talk about their feelings and concerns, and learn effective strategies for dealing with them. Different types of talk therapy include cognitive-behavioral therapy, family therapy, and psychotherapy. In addition, joining a support group may be beneficial. Talk with your doctor or therapist about the best treatment for your child.

