Depression in children and adolescents can be difficult to recognize. Many adults do not believe that children can be depressed, and it is often overlooked. Sometimes parents can identify an issue but assume that the child will grow out of it. Children are also either unable to identify depression on their own or properly express their thoughts and feelings to others. Despite these challenges, it is important to address child and adolescent depression as early as possible. Untreated depression during childhood can increase the risk of prolonged, severe depressive episodes in the future and can also lead to risk for suicide. In addition to these risks, depression can have significant effects on a child’s social and academic functioning, which has lifelong implications. Therefore, early recognition and treatment of depression in children and adolescents can be life-saving.

Every child will occasionally feel sad or hopeless. So how can you tell if your child is depressed or just sad? Children and adolescents who have depression typically experience persistent, intense feelings of sadness and hopelessness that impacts their daily functioning. ***Here are some signs to look for:***

* Unusual sadness or irritability that persists despite a change in circumstances
* Little to no interest in activities previously enjoyed
* Changes in eating patterns
* Changes in sleep patterns
* Sluggishness and decrease in energy
* Shift in behavior and/or academic performance
* Harsh self-assessment and feelings of worthlessness
* Self-injury or self-destructive behavior
* Thoughts of or attempts at suicide

The good news is that depression is treatable, but the sooner the better! Our therapists use several different evidence-based therapies that have shown to be effective in treating depression in children and adolescents, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, and play therapy.

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** During CBT, our therapists help children and adolescents understand how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected. We collaborate with children to set and achieve goals, such as identifying and changing unhelpful thought patterns, and teach them the skills needed to cope with their symptoms.

**Interpersonal therapy (IPT):** In IPT, our therapists focus on children’s social relationships, which can either maintain their depression or suffer because of it. We teach children proper communication and problem-solving skills, and help them understand how their relationships may affect their mood. IPT can be adapted for adolescents with depression to address romantic relationships and communication with parents and peers. Parents may be asked to participate in these sessions.

**Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT):** DBT is a helpful therapy for children with more severe depression who might engage in self-harm or experience suicidal thoughts. During DBT, our therapists teach children and adolescents the practice of mindfulness, as well as problem-solving skills, to help them manage distress and difficult situations in a healthy way.

**Play Therapy:** We believe that children communicate and express themselves through play. In play therapy, our therapists help children address their depression and cope with their depressive symptoms. We use play to teach children how to communicate, express their feelings, take responsibility for their behavior, problem-solve, relate to others, and develop self-efficacy.

Source: childmind.org, cdc.gov, & adaa.org