

## The Link Between Anger and Depression in Children and Adolescents

Studies show that depression in children and adolescents is on the rise. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, more than one in seven teens experience depression each year. Occasional sadness and some degree of moodiness are a normal part of growing up. Recognizing the difference between typical child and adolescent behavior and signs of depression may be challenging for parents and caregivers. Being aware of the symptoms of depression can aid in early intervention. Depression is often associated with feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a lack of motivation or concentration. While symptoms of depression vary from person to person, one symptom that is more common in children and adolescents and often overlooked is the feeling of anger/irritability.



Experts in the field of mental health note that persistent grouching, outbursts, irritability, or difficulty managing everyday challenges at home or in school, may be a symptom of something more than anger. According to clinicians at the Child Mind Institute, irritability may replace the depressed, sad mood that we often associate with depression. It can be helpful for parents and caregivers to recognize that for some kids and teens, it is easier to experience anger than sadness and other painful feelings. Thus, the feelings of anger might be a secondary emotion to deeper-rooted thoughts and feelings.

How can you tell if a young person's irritability or anger is associated with depression? Normal irritability is often intermittent and a reaction to a specific event or experience. With depression, it can look like a constant state of being on edge. As such, irritability or anger are often present throughout the day and in multiple environments (i.e. home and school). If you have noticed unusual irritability or anger in a child or teen, engage in a conversation about how they are feeling. Something may be going on at home or school that is driving the behavior. If it seems to be a general angry or irritable mood that lasts for weeks or longer, consider if it is accompanied by other symptoms of depression. Other symptoms of depression include:

- Lacking energy or feeling tired
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep or eating habits
- Losing interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- Withdrawing from friends or family
- Feeling worthless or engaging in negative self-talk
- Thoughts of suicide

Depression is treatable, especially when caught early. Treatment can include both medication and therapeutic support such as cognitive behavioral therapy that focuses on helping kids learn how to cope

with difficult emotions. To learn more, talk to your family doctor or seek out help from a trained mental health professional.

References: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry; Child Mind Institute; National Institute on Mental Health; Psychology Today