

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

Rx



What is prescription drug abuse?

Prescription drug abuse occurs when someone uses a prescription drug that was not prescribed to them and/or when prescription medicine is used in a way not intended by the prescriber/doctor.

Why do/would youth abuse prescription medications?

Sometimes youth abuse prescription drugs with the belief it helps them be more successful in their daily lives such as:

- They believe it helps with school performance (classwork and tests)
- They believe it helps with athletic performance
- They believe it helps with peer/social situations

Of course, youth also abuse prescription drugs for the sole purpose of “getting high”/altering the state of their mind.

Which prescription drugs are most often abused?

The most often abused prescription drugs generally are found in three different drug classes:

- **Opioids:** Such as Fentanyl, oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and meperidine (Demerol), prescribed for pain management.
- **Central Nervous System (CNS) Depressants:** Such as phenobarbital (Luminal), diazepam (Valium), and alprazolam (Xanax), **prescribed for** seizures, anxiety, panic attacks, and sleep disorders.
- **Stimulants:** Such as methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine/dextroamphetamine (Adderall), often prescribed for ADHD

Are prescription drugs really that bad?

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, prescription drug abuse by American teens is a serious problem. About *1 in 4* teens have misused/abused prescription drugs at one time or another.

What many parents fail to recognize is that prescription drugs can affect the brain and body the same way illicit/illegal drugs affect the brain and body. And just like alcohol or illegal drugs, prescription drugs can lead to dependence and addiction.

Here are some of the more concerning affects for the three different drug classes of prescription drugs that are most often abused:

Opioid Abuse can lead to mood and behavior changes, trouble thinking clearly, poor decision-making, shallow/slowed breathing, and/or even a coma or death. All of these possible affects, especially the risk of coma and/or death, substantially increase when opioids are taken with other substances like alcohol, antihistamines, and CNS depressants.

CNS Depressant Abuse can cause drowsiness/sleepiness, loss of coordination, confusion, slurred speech and/or slowed and shallow breathing. Furthermore, abruptly stopping or reducing these drugs too quickly can lead to seizures. Furthermore, taking CNS depressants with other prescription pain medication (opioids), some over-the-counter cold and allergy medicines, and/or alcohol can slow a person's heart rate and breathing, which can lead to brain damage and/or death.

Stimulant Abuse (like with some ADHD drugs) may cause heart problems due to an increased heart rate, seizures, panic attacks, paranoia, and violent behavior. Like the other prescription drugs listed, these risks increase when stimulants are mixed with

other prescription and illicit drugs as well as over the counter (OTC) medications like cold and allergy medications.

What are some signs and symptoms of prescription drug abuse?

Opioids:

- Constipation
- Nausea
- Feeling high
- Slowed breathing rate
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Poor coordination
- Increased dose needed for pain relief

CNS Depressant:

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Unsteady walking
- Slurred speech
- Poor concentration
- Dizziness
- Problems with memory
- Slowed breathing

Stimulants:

- Increased alertness
- Feeling high
- Irregular heartbeat
- High blood pressure
- High body temperature
- Reduced appetite
- Insomnia
- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Paranoia

Some other possible signs:

- Forging, stealing or selling prescriptions
- Taking higher doses than prescribed
- Being hostile or having mood swings
- Sleeping less or more
- Making poor decisions
- Being unusually energetic, high or revved up
- Being drowsy
- Requesting early refills or continually "losing" prescriptions, so more prescriptions must be written
- Trying to get prescriptions from more than one prescriber

What can parents do to address prescription drug abuse?

- **Be a role model-** don't misuse prescription drugs yourself.
- Have open conversations-Talk with your kids about healthy ways to handle life expectations and experiences and help them come up with some healthy, safe ways to cope.
- **Discuss the dangers of mixing prescription drugs with other substances (pharming).** Combining prescription drugs and OTC medications with other illicit drugs or alcohol, greatly increases the possibility of an overdose.
- **Consider keeping naloxone (Narcan) on hand.** Naloxone is a prescribed medicine that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. If you suspect your child or their friends are abusing opioids, talk to your healthcare provider about having naloxone on hand.
 - For more information about and where to get naloxone, click the link below:
<https://stopodne.com/>
- **Keep your prescription medications in a secure place.** Ideally, locking medications up is often the most effective way to keep them out of the hands of youth. Even if you can't lock them up, keeping them in a secure place (not in the bathroom or kitchen cabinet) can also be very effective.
- **Dispose of any unused prescription drugs.** Ask your pharmacist about safe medicine disposal options in your area.

<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/family/how-teens-misuse-medicine>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4827331/>

https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/resource-center/Publications/DEA_Prescription-For-Disaster_508ver.pdf

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/prescription-drug-abuse.html>

Smartphone Addiction and Misuse

Addictions can take many shapes. Traditionally, we think of controlled substances when we speak about addiction, whether it be legally obtained prescription drugs, illegally obtained controlled substances, or more socially acceptable substances like alcohol or cigarettes. Allowing the definition to expand a bit further, we can see addictions to certain activities, such as gambling and video-gaming. These tendencies tend to be easily recognized by others as issues. However, for a huge number of people, an addiction they are experiencing is hiding right under their noses. It contributes to decreased social interaction and attention span, poor sleeping quality, and has comorbidity with depression and anxiety. This is, of course, cell phone addiction.

Cell phones are completely ubiquitous in our society. According to Pew Research Center, 97% of people in America own a cell phone. For many, it's their only method of connecting to others or the internet. This reliance makes it exceedingly easy to form very large habits of using phones at all times and for everything. On top of this, while not necessarily the fault of the phone itself, the apps on smartphones are designed in such a way that they're meant to force your brain into creating as much dopamine as possible. They do this to boost the amount of time you spend on their app which increases the amount of advertiser dollars they earn. Unfortunately for the user, this has a side effect of teaching your brain that it feels better whenever a phone is in your hand. The stronger this association grows, the more time you'll tend to devote to your phone, leading to further addiction and higher usage, in a feedback loop. If this cycle of use sounds familiar, it may be because it mimics the cycle of addiction that any other substance user would experience. This is because the apps on smartphones prey on the same receptors that most addictive substances do, in order to make us keep coming back for more.

The consequences of cell phone addictions can be subtle, but without proper care they can build up into large, long-lasting effects. First and foremost, excessive smartphone usage is associated with increased loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Despite the nonstop connection that phones advertise, the effects of prolonged usage tend to actually make people feel less connected. Constantly comparing themselves to those on social media and fears of missing out on what is happening on their phone both add to the stress that smart phones can cause, particularly in teens. While these are the biggest concerns of smart phone misuse, others include:

- Worsening attention deficit disorders – Particularly for those who already have difficulty with attention, the impact of perpetually being bombarded with messages and notifications can add to their difficulties with attention.
- Sleep cycle disturbances – For many, especially youth, their phone is the first thing they touch when they wake up. While this may be less disruptive in the mornings, when one wakes up in the middle of the night and scrolls on their phone, their sleep cycle is being heavily disrupted. Blue light from phone screens can make it difficult to sleep properly after opening a phone, and while the sleep cycle can resume somewhat easily after a normal wake-up, attempting to resume it after giving attention to a phone can be much more difficult

- Struggles thinking creatively – For many tasks that require deep thought and creativity, a smart phone makes it difficult to acquire true focus on the task and find new solutions to problems requiring thorough thought and creative problem solving.

This addiction can be hard to define. After all, most everybody needs a cell phone in order to function well in the today's world. Signs and symptoms of cell phone addiction can include:

- Lying about use
- Excessive usage
- Difficulty completing duties at school, work, or home
- Repeatedly checking the same things out of anxiety (such as friends' profiles, Twitter feeds, the news)
- Feeling of lack of connection, despite frequent use
- Anger, anxiety, irritation, or other emotional concerns when use is interrupted
- Waking up repeatedly to use devices
- Checking devices immediately whenever left alone or bored
- Cravings when unable to use
- Anxiety when devices aren't within a close distance

It's important to remember that addictions can look different for everyone. Particularly with usage time, a problematic number can be different for everyone. Two people may both spend six hours on their phone a day, but if one is making conscious choices about what they do on their device, and maintaining an ability to put it down, they likely aren't suffering from an addiction. On the other hand, if someone finds themselves mindlessly scrolling TikTok for an hour, or opening Twitter the second they're not being spoken to, that person likely has an unhealthy usage habit with their device.

Teens in particular have an especially high vulnerability to cell phone addiction. Almost all of the current teen culture is created and spread online, and not being able to access it can make it very hard for them to feel capable of socializing properly with their peers. In addition to this, the pattern-seeking behaviors that smartphones prey upon to get people addicted are more active in teenagers, causing their addictions to smart devices to be even stronger and harder to avoid. If you're concerned with a teen's cell phone usage, an excellent first step is sitting them down and discussing what you've seen. Setting expectations for proper phone usage, and sticking to the same rules that you'd like to see them follow, helps teens to see that the concerns presented to them are serious and come from a place of caring.

Curbing cell phone addictions can be extremely difficult. Devices can feel as if they are required for our existence, and are designed in such a way that it becomes extremely easy to build bad habits around their use. Here are just a few methods to help decrease usage, and decrease reliance on smartphones.

- Track usage and use parental controls – For many, unlimited screen time is exactly what the name implies. For those who cannot put down their phone, but need to, using parental controls can be a great tool. Have a parent or a trusted friend set a password to the parental controls that you don't know. This way, when you run out of time, you'll have to give them a good reason to make them give you more time in the app, instead of being fully unmonitored.
- Disable Notifications – Push notifications are one of the largest contributors to FOMO. Even when not using the smart phone, notifications act as a constant reminder of what could be done on the phone. Disabling these prevents phones from drawing your attention with every message or update.
- Remove chargers from bedrooms – Sleep disruption from frequently checking phones can have serious effects on development for teens, and high functioning as adults. A great way to curb night usage is to make it impossible to charge the device at your bed. If someone needs to get up from their bed to check their device, they likely will simply go back to sleep.

For more information on smartphone addictions, check out the resources below.

<https://scipnebraska.com/resources/resources/digital-citizenship.html>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/phone-addiction/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5076301/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ldLwkj4dRc&pp=ygUUc21hcnRwaG9uZSBhZGRpY3Rpb24%3D>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>