

## **Depression & Suicide in Children and Adolescents**

It may be hard for some adults to understand how a child can be depressed when we generally view childhood as a happy and carefree time. This article will help you to better understand depression and suicide.

Many factors may contribute to a person's decision to try to kill himself. These include alcohol and drug abuse, pressure to perform, poor family support and exposure to violence. Stressful events such as a romantic break-up or a failing grade contribute to the problem. Underlying much of the trouble is depression.

Depression is characterized by a strong sense of unhappiness, lack of control, poor self-worth and hopelessness. Without help from family or professionals, depressed children and adolescents may be drawn to one another, feeding their sense of hopelessness and belief that their feelings will never end.

Warning signs to parents and others include:

- Changes in eating, increased or decreased
- Changes in sleeping, increased or decreased
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Decreasing grades
- Drug or alcohol use
- Sloppier appearance
- Exaggerated physical complaints
- Interest in music or books with messages about death
- Giving away belongings
- Any talk about suicide

If you think your child is depressed or considering suicide:

- Remember that depression is treatable
- Do not dismiss your teen's emotions or tell him to be strong. Talk and listen. Do not joke about feelings.
- Point out that everyone feels sad sometimes.
- Ask about thoughts of suicide. Your questions will not lead to suicide in a child who is not already considering it.
- Make your home safer by locking firearms and ammunition in separate areas and storing medications in places where your child cannot access them

Help is available:

- 911 for a life threatening emergency
- The local Mobile Response Team - 908-788-6400 for mental health emergencies
- NJ Children's System of Care - 877-652-7624, [www.performcarenj.org](http://www.performcarenj.org) for both mental health resources and a mental health emergency
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 800-237-8255, [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources
- Crisis Text Line – text 741741 to text with a trained crisis counselor
- We are here to help you and we can guide you to other professionals as well