

# Depression in the Family:

## When You or Your Child is Struggling With Depression

COUNSELING PARTNERS OF LOS ANGELES



## Depression is more than sadness

We all have moments of sadness and despair. It's part of the human condition. But depression is different. You may know someone struggling with a sadness that will not go away. Perhaps it is your friend, your partner, your child, or even yourself.

As a mental health disorder, depression is the state of having a persistent and debilitating low-mood, whereas sadness is temporary and fleeting. Those who struggle with depression are not weak. A mixture of biological and environmental factors contribute to depression and cause it to be so nefarious.

It is important to treat depression as it can impact all aspects of family life. For example, if your partner has depression, your relationship may be strained, or if your child struggles with persistent low-mood, you may grow frustrated and just want to "shake them out of it", which can make them feel alienated and misunderstood.

In this newsletter, we will review ways you and your family can cope with depression. We will also highlight developmentally appropriate methods of discussing depression and suicide with your children. Often, this mental health condition makes its sufferers feel alone. Our goal is to make sure you are empowered to seek out support

## About CPLA

The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students and teachers need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.

## Interested in services for your child?

CPLA's counseling services are **FREE** to all students attending one of our partner schools! Reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher. You can also request a CPLA referral form from the school.



# Parenting Through Depression

*"If you are a parent who struggles with depression, you are not alone. Research shows that 8.4 percent of adults in the U.S. -- or 21 million people -- have experienced at least one major depressive episode."*

-Child Mind Institute

## Symptoms of Depression:

- consistently low or irritable mood
- loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable
- sleep disturbances (sleeping too little or too much)
- lack of energy.
- changes in appetite
- weight changes
- feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- hopelessness
- concentration issues
- moving or speaking more slowly or more quickly than expected
- recurring thoughts about death or suicide

Parenting is hard enough on its own. Throw depression into the mix and it can become unbearable. It's important to remember that depression is different from ordinary parenting stress. All of us experience rough days when we feel overwhelmed. The difference is that depression symptoms persist on good days as well. They may also be worsened by stressful ones.

Depression also has the chance of negatively affecting the social and emotional development of our children. When we ourselves are struggling emotionally, it can be hard to model positive coping to our children and provide for their needs. However, just because we have depression doesn't mean we are bad parents. It means we need some extra support. See the orange box below for ways you can obtain assistance.

Depression often makes us think that we are inherently bad or worthless. That is NOT the case. It's important to be gentle with yourself as you are learning as you go and doing the best you can.

Sources used: <https://psychcentral.com/depression/how-to-parent-with-depression>  
<https://childmind.org/article/parenting-through-depression/>

## How to get support and treatment

- 1.If you have access to a primary care physician, schedule an appointment. They should be able to give you referrals, prescribe medication, and assess your symptoms and specific needs.
2. Therapy. Call the SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357 for resources and information about low-cost mental health support. This may look like individual therapy, support groups for parenting/depression, or psychiatry.
3. Consider participating in **CPLA's Parent Counseling and Coaching Services** for non-crisis support. We provide counseling (8 FREE SESSIONS) to parents/caregivers of children attending our partner schools. Intended to not be crisis-intervention, our services help you determine how to be the best person for yourself and your family.

If you ever find yourself in a mental health crisis, please call **988**. Receive confidential and compassionate help from trained counselors and resource providers. If you feel like you may hurt yourself or others, please call **911** or going to the nearest emergency room.



# Talking with Kids About Depression

How you talk with your children about depression and suicide depends on how old they are. It's important to discuss this mental health condition because it is becoming increasingly more prevalent.

## Older kids and teens:

- Explain that depression is a mental health condition affecting people's brains. You'll want to stress that depression is never someone's fault but rather an illness. It could be helpful to compare it to a chronic condition like diabetes. By doing so, you can also communicate that there are ways to protect yourself from it, as well as treat and manage it.
- If your child has depression, try to offer a nonjudgmental listening ear. This allows them to feel they are not alone and that they have support from you. It's also helpful to mention, in order to reassure your child, that depression is treatable and that remission is possible.
- If you suspect that your child might have depression, you can ask them what symptoms they have been experiencing.

For more information:

<https://psychcentral.com/depression/how-to-explain-depression-to-a-child#talking-with-your-kid>

## Younger children:

- Younger kids may not be able to understand medical concepts like neurotransmitters, symptoms, and the brain. It is best to try to make them imagine in their own experience what depression is like. For example, you can ask them to remember a time when they felt sad and say that those who have depression feel that way, but the sadness never goes away.
- Consider using an analogy for younger children. As an example, you can state that those who have depression feel like there is a big rain cloud following them wherever they are although for everyone else it is sunny outside.
- Reassure your child that depression is not anyone's fault nor is it something to be embarrassed about.

**If your child is experiencing mental health issues, it is important to get them treatment. CPLA offers counseling free of charge to students attending its partner schools. Please reach out to the principal or your student's teacher for a referral.**

## Questions your kids may ask

### Sometimes I feel sad. Am I depressed?

Kids may come to equate sadness with depression, especially younger children. Whether your child actually has depression or not, it is important to stress that depression and sadness are not the same thing. Depression is a persistent sad, irritable, or low feeling that occurs everyday for 2 weeks or longer. If you think your child may be depressed, we encourage you to reach out to a school counselor.

### Will I ever feel better?

If your child is experiencing depression, they may start feeling hopeless. It's important at this point to explain that there are many treatments that can help them feel better. You can introduce the concept of therapy and what a therapist does - that they are trusted adults who help you work through feelings through play and talking. Also communicate your belief that your child will get through the depression and that you'll be with them every step of the way.

### Why is this happening to me?

Your child may ask why they are experiencing depression when their friends are not. The best thing is to be honest and explain that you aren't quite sure. Tell them that psychologists and scientists are still trying to figure out why some get depression and others don't.

**Above all, it's important to communicate that depression is NOT their fault.**