

### How to Prevent Depression in Children

**Depression—also known as major depressive disorder—is a serious medical illness. Depression affects the way you feel, how you act, and the way you think. It can occur in adults, adolescents, and even children. In the United States, around**[**2 million children between the ages of 3 and 17**](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/anxiety-depression-children.html)**have diagnosed depression. This article will cover some of the ways you can both prevent child depression and help children dealing with depression.**

**How to Help a Child with Depression**

**Unfortunately, preventing depression in children isn’t always possible. However, some of the ways that help to prevent depression are the same things you can do to help a depressed child. Here are some of the methods for helping a child with depression:**

* **Know the Symptoms of Depression - First, it’s crucial to know the signs of depression in a child. These include behaviors such as:**
  + **Feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable often**
  + **Not wanting to do anything**
  + **No longer enjoying things they normally enjoy**
  + **Changes in eating patterns—eating more or less than usual**
  + **Changes in sleeping patterns—sleeping more or less than usual**
  + **Changes in energy levels—being more tired, stressed, sluggish, or tense a lot of the time**
  + **Injuring themselves or displaying destructive behavior**
  + **Having difficulty paying attention**
  + **Displaying signs that they feel useless, guilty, or worthless**
* **Talking Openly - It’s also essential to be able to talk openly with your child. Remind them that you are always there for them for whatever they need and will never judge them. Remind them that it’s okay to talk about how they feel and any stress they may have. This will increase the likelihood of them coming to you if they are feeling depressed.**
* **Eating Healthily - An important part of preventing and managing depression in children is to make sure they are eating healthily. If they don’t receive the vitamins and nutrients they need each day, it can affect how their brains and bodies grow, develop, and function, which can ultimately impact how they feel. Make sure they are getting enough vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean protein, legumes, and nuts/seeds in their diet each day.**
* **Getting Enough Sleep - It’s also necessary to get enough sleep in order to help manage depression. Getting the proper amount and quality of sleep impacts our overall health and well-being and helps to prevent the development of other issues. Your child should be getting the**[**recommended number of hours of sleep each night based on their age**](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html)**.**
* **Practicing Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques -**[**Practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques are two very important tools**](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5679245/)**for preventing and managing childhood depression. Making**[**mindfulness exercises**](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/six-relaxation-techniques-to-reduce-stress)**a part of your daily routine can help decrease stress and calm your body and mind. This can help to improve your outlook on your life and decrease negative thoughts and feelings.**
* **Physical Activity - One of the best ways to prevent and manage depression in children is to**[**be physically active**](https://phitamerica.org/benefits/the-miracle-drug/8-reduces-depression-anxiety-more-smiles/)**. When you exercise,**[**your body releases endorphins**](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/6091217/)**that help to reduce stress, make you feel good, and can help to improve your self-esteem. Similar to getting enough sleep, children should get a**[**certain amount of physical exercise every day based on their age**](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/children/index.htm)**.**
* **Professional Help - It’s also important to seek out professional help when managing your child’s depression. Have them visit with a doctor or therapist so you can get a medical professional’s opinion and the necessary treatment plan. When someone doesn’t receive the help they need, depression can become severe and can even lead to thoughts or plans of suicide. If you are someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 to receive help.**

**At PHIT America Foundation, we believe that physical activity is a**[**Miracle Drug for kids that can help to prevent depression**](https://phitamerica.org/benefits/the-miracle-drug/8-reduces-depression-anxiety-more-smiles/)**, stress, and anxiety, and improve their mental health. That’s why we think that**[**physical education teachers have the most important job in America**](https://phitamerica.org/benefits/most-important-job-in-america/)**and that**[**PE is a necessity in schools**](https://phitamerica.org/news-blogs/blog/why-kids-need-physical-education-in-school/)**in order to build a healthier future for our children.**  
**We aim to improve the physical and mental health of children all across the United States by providing kids with increased physical activity programs, like our**[**AMPED programs**](https://phitamerica.org/key-programs/amped/)**; getting physical education back in schools; and helping children afford to play organized sports.**[**Sign our petition for healthy kids**](https://phitamerica.org/key-programs/petition-require-physical-activity-30-minutes-3-times-a-week/)**, or visit our website to find out**[**how you can get involved**](https://phitamerica.org/)**and bring an AMPED program to a school near you! You can also help us get kids active and healthy by**[**donating to us**](https://phitamerica.org/donate/)**today!**