

PTSD

All children may experience very stressful events that affect how they think and feel. Most of the time, children and teens recover quickly and well. However, sometimes children who experience severe stress, such as from an injury, from the death or threatened death of a close family member or friend, or from violence, will be affected long-term. The child could experience this trauma directly or could witness it happening to someone else. When children and teens develop long term symptoms (longer than one month) from such stress, which are upsetting or interfere with their relationships and activities, they may be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Examples of PTSD symptoms include

- Reliving the event over and over in thought or in play
- Nightmares and sleep problems
- Becoming very upset when something causes memories of the event
- Lack of positive emotions
- Intense ongoing fear or sadness
- Irritability and angry outbursts
- Constantly looking for possible threats, being easily startled
- Acting helpless, hopeless or withdrawn
- Denying that the event happened or feeling numb
- Avoiding places or people associated with the event

Because children and teens who have experienced traumatic stress may seem restless, fidgety, or have trouble paying attention and staying organized, the symptoms of traumatic stress can be confused with symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Depression

Occasionally being sad or feeling hopeless is a part of every child's or teen's life. However, some children feel sad or uninterested in things that they used to enjoy, or feel helpless or hopeless in situations they are able to change. When children and teens feel persistent sadness and hopelessness, they may be diagnosed with depression.

- Crankiness or anger
- Continuous feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Social withdrawal
- Being more sensitive to rejection
- Changes in appetite, either increased or decreased
- Changes in sleep (sleeplessness or excessive sleep)
- Vocal outbursts or crying
- Trouble concentrating
- Fatigue and low energy
- Physical complaints (such as stomachaches and headaches) that don't respond to treatment
- Trouble during events and activities at home or with friends, in school, during extracurricular activities, and with other hobbies or interests
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Impaired thinking or concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Not all children have all of these symptoms. In fact, most will show different symptoms at different times and in different settings. Although some children may continue to do reasonably well in structured environments, most kids with significant depression will have a noticeable change in social activities, loss of interest in school, poor academic performance, or a change in appearance. Children and teens may also begin using drugs or alcohol, especially if they are over age 12.

Anxiety

When a child or teen does not outgrow the fears and worries that are typical in youth, or when there are so many fears and worries that they interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child or teen may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Examples of different types of anxiety disorders include

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Being very worried about the future and about bad things happening
- Physical tension in body parts such as shoulders, face, or back
- Feeling keyed up or on edge
- Sleep problems such as insomnia
- Loss of appetite, and to a lesser extent, increase in appetite

Other Anxiety Disorders

- Being very afraid when away from parents (separation anxiety)
- Having extreme fear about a specific thing or situation, such as dogs, insects, or going to the doctor (phobias)
- Being very afraid of school and other places where there are people (social anxiety)
- Having repeated episodes of sudden, unexpected, intense fear that come with symptoms like heart pounding, having trouble breathing, or feeling dizzy, shaky, or sweaty (panic disorder)

Anxiety may present as fear or worry but can also make children irritable and angry. Anxiety symptoms can also include trouble sleeping, as well as physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, or stomachaches. Some anxious children and teens keep their worries to themselves and, thus, the symptoms can be missed.