Guidelines for Families

I think my child may be experiencing symptoms of depression. What should I do?

- Consult with your child’s pediatrician or family physician. A mental health assessment and evaluation can be done for a diagnosis and treatment plan. Your doctor may refer you to a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or counselor.

- Do not delay treatment. Early detection and diagnosis are so important in getting your child the help needed. Parents can often feel responsible for what is happening with their children, but parents do not cause depression.

- Life stressors such as an illness, separation/divorce, move, or death can trigger short-term problems and possibly lead to depression. Under these stressors, it is helpful for families to turn to a mental health professional. Depression is treatable, but if left untreated can be life threatening. Depression is a major risk factor for suicide.

- Parents may feel guilty if they are unable to “cheer up” their child. It is easy to place blame on what you may be doing or not doing. Remember, depression is an illness that needs professional treatment. Communicate with your child’s school. Teachers, school psychologists/social workers are also there to help.

- Talk to your child and listen carefully. Never dismiss feelings, but point out realities and offer hope.

- Remind your child that you are always there to help and support him/her. Depressed children need continual reassurance. It is common for them to feel unworthy when experiencing depression.

- Encourage and be a positive role model for a healthy lifestyle. Getting proper nutrition, having adequate sleep, and exercising all help alleviate stress, build relationships, and can improve mood.

- Help your child with problem-solving skills. Develop a plan of realistic steps your child can take toward a goal, recognize their success on the path, and encourage the enjoyment of the experience along the way. Help identify potential obstacles or difficulties and plan/talk about ways to overcome them. Focus on strengths.

- Never ignore statements and comments about death or suicide. Report them to your child’s doctor immediately and if you believe your child is in immediate danger do not leave him/her alone. Contact your local emergency room or call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). You may develop a safety and emergency plan of your own. Have a list of numbers ready to call.

References:
Childhood Depression: What Parents Can Do To Help.
http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Childhood-Depression-What-Parents-Can-Do-To-Help.aspx

Dryden-Edwards, Roxanne (reviewed June 2013) Depression in Children.
http://www.onhealth.com/depression_in_children/article.htm

Nemours. Understanding Depression. Kidshealth.org

Nemours. Understanding Depression.
http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/understanding_depression.html

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The mission of the International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression is to shine a positive light on depression and eliminate the stigma associated with the disease through prevention, research and education. Its goal is to ensure that 100% of the 350 million people affected by depression seek and receive treatment.