



Tips for Recovery from Depressive Disorders for Families

Developed in Collaboration with Northeast Behavioral Health Partnership and the Member and Family Advisory Board

1. **Symptoms may look different in children.** Sometimes children exhibit depression by acting out or by expressing anger. And sometimes they will exhibit different symptoms in different settings, like school or home. Most of the time, however, the symptoms of depression in children are similar to depression in adults.
2. **Participate in your child's treatment.** You are the expert about your child. Be actively involved in setting your child's treatments goals and your treatment plan. Your child's treatment should be based on your child's needs and goals.
3. **Treat suicidal thoughts seriously.** Although suicide is rare in children, talk openly about any suicidal thoughts your child is having with his or her clinician, prescriber or a nurse. If needed, get immediate help by calling 911 or going to the nearest hospital emergency room. Develop a safety plan with your child's therapist.
4. **Ask questions.** Ask your clinician or medication prescriber to explain your child's diagnosis, treatment alternatives, and his/her recommendations. If you don't understand something, ask again. Write down questions ahead of time and bring them to the session. Be sure to talk to your primary care physician about your child's symptoms and medications.
5. **Be alert to early symptoms.** Symptoms of depression can return. Seek treatment as soon as possible. Ask your clinician about developing a Recovery Plan or Crisis Plan for your child and share these with family and friends.
6. **Help your child cultivate supportive relationships** with family, friends and peer support groups. The more positive relationships your child has, the better. Try to limit the amount of time your child spends alone. Make sure your child keeps up with social activities, even if he or she doesn't feel like it.
7. **Model appropriate self-care.** Establish and model a healthy lifestyle. Make sure your child is exposed to natural sunlight for a few minutes every day, especially in the fall and winter. Physical activity can help their mood. Establish an exercise routine for your family and eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
8. **Obtain support for yourself.** Assisting your child in recovering from depression can be stressful on you. Ask your child's therapist about how to obtain support for yourself.
9. **Sleep.** Depending upon their age, children may need more sleep than adults. Make sure your child

gets enough sleep. Some recommended amounts of sleep for different age groups are: Children (3 to 6 years) 10-12 hours of sleep. Children (7 to 10 years) 10-11 hours of sleep. Youths (11-18 years) 8 to 9 hours of sleep.

10. **Keep appointments.** This is time devoted to help your child, so use it effectively. If your child takes an antidepressant medication, make sure they take it regularly, even if they are feeling better. Call your prescriber if you have any questions, or if your child has uncomfortable side effects. Ask about medications which may have fewer side effects. Be open with your child's therapist and remain willing to consider new perspectives.
11. **Help your child practice skills.** Often therapy for depression involves learning new ways to think about events and experiences in your life. Help your child complete therapy homework they are given. Practice helps when learning these new skills. Avoid being too critical of your child and identify and accept his or her feelings. Continue setting appropriate limits on behavior and praise positive behaviors.
12. **Learn how people recover from depression.** Ask for written materials, read information from the library. Three internet sites to start with are the National Institute of Mental Health (1.800.421.4211 or www.nimh.nih.gov), WebMD (<http://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/depression-children>), and the NBHP website, www.nbhpartnership.com, and www.achievesolutions.net.