

BASC-2™

Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition

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All children feel sad sometimes. Earning a bad grade in school, doing something wrong at home, arguing with friends, or not being included by others are common reasons why children may feel sad. Many times, this sadness lasts for only a brief amount of time. But when a child's sadness lasts for too long, it can begin to interfere with everyday activities, and it might be a sign that he or she is struggling with symptoms of **depression**.

Children with depressive symptoms can show many different feelings, such as loneliness, sadness, or frustration. They may act differently, too, by whining, being overly negative, or having mood swings. A child with symptoms of depression may start to believe that bad things happen because he or she is a bad person. Such thinking can affect most areas in a child's life. The good things can seem bad, and the bad things seem terrible.

Each child's symptoms of depression are unique and are caused for different reasons. Some possible causes include:

- loss of a family member or friend
- high levels of stress at school or at home
- negative self-image
- personal relationships

Teaching new coping skills is key for helping your child manage unhealthy thoughts and behaviors.

Depressive symptoms can quickly change a child's life both in and out of school. His or her grades or school attendance may drop. A child who is a gifted performer or athlete may begin to struggle with a talent or a game. He or she may suddenly switch friends or may lose friends altogether. These changes can make a child feel even worse. The longer these feelings persist, the harder it can be for the child.

It's not always easy to identify a child who is experiencing symptoms of depression. At first, one or two symptoms or behaviors may be seen, and these symptoms may be viewed as normal. But over time, these symptoms or behaviors can increase or worsen.

When viewed together, they may

reveal a more serious problem. For parents and other people who see a child every day, it can be hard to notice how bad a child's problems have become. Sometimes, a person who sees a child less frequently is the first to notice these issues.

Many doctors and researchers believe that there are several possible causes for depression. Some of these causes come from a child's environment and surroundings. Other causes might be from changes that occur within a child. Regardless of the cause, there are many things you and others can do to help your child with his or her depressive symptoms.

Not knowing the reason for your child's symptoms of depression can be hard. Parents sometimes feel like they're not doing enough to make their child happy, or that their child isn't grateful for things he or she has. Understanding and using the strategies in this tip sheet is one of several ways that you can help your child.

Dealing With Depression

Children who experience symptoms of depression may:

- act lonely, sad, or frustrated
- become overly negative, whine, or have mood swings
- perform poorly in school
- lose interest in activities
- suddenly change or lose friends

Several approaches can help your child manage his or her symptoms of depression effectively, including:

- changing bad moods
- planning fun activities
- teaching self-calming behavior
- using positive thoughts

Tracking Your Child's Progress

When working with your child to improve his or her behavior, it is important to track the progress being made. Use the following chart to track the number of times you worked with your child on his or her new behaviors and to track how often your child engages in both new behaviors and problem behaviors. Be sure to record both the behavior to change (e.g., avoiding activities) and the newly learned behavior (e.g., participating in activities). Also, determine the number of times during each week the new behavior should be practiced or used, and set a reward that will be given if the goal is met. Talk with the person who gave you this form to determine if or when it should be returned or replaced.

Child's Name _____ Child's Age _____ Parent's Name _____

Goal: _____ of 7 boxes checked per week will result in a reward of: _____

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Dates: Behavior to change: New behavior to use:	____ - ____ _____ _____	____ - ____ _____ _____	____ - ____ _____ _____	____ - ____ _____ _____	____ - ____ _____ _____
Parent Today I taught a new strategy or practiced a strategy with my child.	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>
Child Today I used or practiced my new strategy.	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>
Today I felt: 1=very sad, 2=slightly sad 3=okay, 4=happy 5=very happy (Write each day's score in its box.)	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>

Place a check mark or score in each box as needed.

This tip sheet provides information that may be helpful for changing how your child manages unhealthy thoughts and behaviors. With the help of your child's school, you can help your child understand and manage his or her feelings. Research tells us that when parents and schools work together to set goals and plan strategies, children learn and adapt more quickly.

The following pages discuss approaches that will give you the tools you need to help reduce your child's symptoms of depression. However, if your child's symptoms last a long time or worsen, it might be helpful to involve your family physician.

Working With Your Child

Talking with your child about depressive symptoms can be difficult. However, it is an important step to understanding why these sad or angry feelings persist and what may be the best way to help. Your child may not be willing to talk much about his or her feelings. Starting a conversation shows your child that his or her feelings are important to you. Listening and developing a plan for helping shows that you are committed to making things better.

There are many things you can do to help make the conversation easier. You can show your child the conversation is important by talking during a time that is **unhurried** and **free from distractions**.

Try to **keep the conversation short**. You will be the best judge of how long your child can pay attention to the conversation, but you might want to keep your first conversation to no more than 10 minutes.

When talking with your child about his or her symptoms of depression, make sure to:

- choose a place that is free from distractions
- keep the conversation brief
- maintain a positive and calm attitude
- focus on one situation at a time

Did you know?

- About 1 in every 33 children and 1 in 8 adolescents may have symptoms of depression.
- Once a child experiences an episode of depression, he or she is at risk of having another episode within the next 5 years.
- Teenage girls are more likely to develop symptoms of depression than teenage boys.

When speaking with your child, try to maintain a **positive and calm** attitude. Try not to judge your child's thoughts or feelings. If you become frustrated and upset when talking with your child, he or she may be unwilling to talk about his or her feelings. Also, **staying positive** will provide a good example for your child to follow.

During your conversation, focus on your child's emotions rather than your child's behavior. Keep in mind that your child may misinterpret his or her sad or negative feelings as a personal weakness. Your child may be feeling like "everything's my fault," so listen to what your child is saying. Avoid interrupting, even if what's being said seems unrealistic to you. Following these suggestions will help you and your child stay focused on finding a solution.

Sometimes children need help to keep their feelings in perspective. Your child may need to practice talking more specifically about situations that cause bad feelings. Talking keeps problems and feelings in their place rather than spilling into the good things in your child's life. This approach may be more helpful for children who are good at talking about their feelings. Also, be sure to give as much support as your child needs so he or she has the best chance possible to succeed.

With the following strategies, it can be helpful to **provide examples** of how to use them. Make sure that the examples you use are meaningful to your child. Use examples of situations or behaviors that your child has experienced. The conversations you have with your child about his or her depressive symptoms may help you decide what kinds of examples will be helpful.

Changing Bad Moods

If your child is experiencing symptoms of depression, one unhappy situation can make the other things in life seem bad, too. It can be hard for him or her to remember that bad feelings don't last forever. Helping to show that a bad mood is only temporary can help your child regain some feelings of control over his or her situation. You can help by following these steps:

1. Identify a problem and discuss how your child is feeling. Talk about how other people might feel the same way in a similar situation. Remind your child that all feelings are okay for a while, even the unpleasant ones, and it's not his or her fault that they occur.
2. Make a list of all the things your child might do when he or she has unpleasant feelings or negative thoughts. Include both the good and bad things that your child could do, and make your own suggestions if your child needs ideas to get started.
3. Talk about how some of the options could help your child feel better and how others might make things worse. Together, choose one good solution from the list.
4. Make a plan. Ask your child to describe what he or she will do the next time the bad feelings seem to be taking over. Be sure to ask your child each day if this strategy was used, and point out how feelings can change because of what your child chooses to do.
5. Provide positive feedback. You might consider rewarding your child for using this strategy. Encourage using this solution in other situations too.

Example:

Sonja lies on her bed after school and won't play games outside with her friends. A girl in her class is having a birthday party, but she didn't invite Sonja. Sonja tells her grandma that nobody likes her and she hates herself. She and her grandma talk about how to solve this problem. While talking, Sonja mentions that a friend had just called to say "hello," and last month, she was invited to two other parties. Her grandma helps Sonja see that lots of people like her. Sonja and her grandma decide that they don't know why Sonja wasn't invited to this party, and Sonja plans a movie night with her friends instead.

Planning Fun Activities

When children experience symptoms of depression, they might avoid the activities and people that they once enjoyed. The loneliness can become one more thing that has gone wrong, and it reinforces the notion of being a bad person. Doing, or even anticipating, something fun gives your child an opportunity to practice feeling good and to reward himself or herself for following through. You can encourage this practice by following these steps:

1. Talk to your child about things he or she likes to do. If your child can't think of anything, suggest an activity that you've seen him or her enjoy in the past, or an outing your child has asked about before.
2. Plan the event. Encourage your child to plan out as many of the steps as possible. Make sure the activity is something realistic for your child and something that you can help make happen.
3. Suggest a special reward for following through on the plan. It may take extra encouragement even though your child chose the fun activity. For example, if your child plans a family picnic at a park, suggest a reward of a new kite to fly or a ball to play catch with.
4. Provide positive feedback. With more practice, your child should begin to stop avoiding things that are fun and may soon not need the incentive of a reward.

Example:

Kendra has been spending more time alone and less time with her friends. After talking with her, Kendra's dad suggested she pick a movie that she'd like to see with her friends. Kendra said she "didn't feel like it." As incentive, her dad said he'd buy the tickets and popcorn for her and two friends. Kendra's dad helped her make a list of what she needed to do to plan the evening and praised her as she completed each task. When Friday night came, Kendra didn't want to go. Her dad reminded Kendra that she was looking forward to going earlier in the week. Afterward, Kendra couldn't stop laughing about the movie, and later she talked about how much fun she had with her friends.

Teaching Self-Calming Behavior

When feelings become overwhelming, the body can feel bad, too. Physical symptoms might appear, such as neck tension, stomach ache, shallow breathing, or being overly tired. Sometimes, it's easier to understand and control the changes in our bodies than the changes in our feelings. Teaching your child how to be nice to his or her body can help your child deal with feelings of sadness or anger. You can help your child by following these steps:

1. Identify the bad feeling your child is having, and discuss what reaction his or her body has when this feeling starts. Some examples might be making a sad or angry face, making a fist, or wanting to put his or her head down on the table.
2. Choose a replacement action. Ask your child to think of a different or surprising action to take instead. Discuss why some automatic reactions (like making a sad face or breathing hard) might result in feeling bad longer, while choosing to smile or take deep breaths might be more helpful.
3. Practice when and how to use a replacement action. If there are times of day, such as bedtime, when the feelings and behaviors often occur, talk about how things will be different with this new plan. Ask your child to act it out, like being in a play.
4. Give positive feedback about specific changes in your child's behavior. Specific feedback may be more helpful than general comments. If your child is young, you might give a small reward for helpful changes. Older children might find value in writing about these changes in a private journal or notebook.

Example:

Each morning for a week, Todd told his mom that he couldn't go to school. He didn't know why, but when it was time to leave, his throat would get tight and he would sit down on the steps and cry. His mom helped Todd make a plan to choose different behaviors when these feelings came on. First, when he felt his throat tighten, he would get an extra drink of water and take three deep breaths. And when Todd felt like crying, instead of sitting down, he would jump in place while saying one thing that he was looking forward to that day—even if it was just coming home and having a snack. The next week, Todd used his new reactions, and his problems before leaving for school began to disappear.

Using Positive Thoughts

Sometimes, children who are sad view almost everything in a negative way. These feelings can last so long that children forget the positive things in their lives. Teaching your child to replace negative thoughts with positive ones can help him or her develop a better future outlook. You can help by following these steps:

1. Choose a problem your child is having. If your child has difficulty talking about it, use an example of a different child who is having a similar problem. This may make your child feel less threatened and more willing to talk about the problem.
2. Ask your child to list the negative thoughts that happen when the problem occurs. If your child finds this difficult, suggest some feelings that you think he or she is having.
3. Talk about these feelings. Teach your child how to recognize negative thoughts. Explain how negative thoughts can cause things to seem worse than they really are.
4. Develop a list of positive things in your child's life. Ask your child to imagine a stop sign when negative thoughts happen. Then, ask your child to think about two or three things from the positive list instead.
5. Ask your child to record each time a negative thought is replaced with one from the positive list. Use the Tracking Your Child's Progress form in this tip sheet.
6. Follow up with your child each day to see how it is working.

Example:

Juanita, a 14-year-old-girl, feels like she can never do anything right. After getting a D on a test at school, she tells her mother, "This proves I am useless. I try and try, but can never do anything right." Her mother reviews the test with her and praises Juanita for test questions she got right. Juanita's mother reminds her how helpful she is with her little brother. Together, they create a list of other positive things. Juanita keeps the list with her so whenever she thinks or says something negative, she can pull out the list and read it. Within a few weeks, Juanita still has negative thoughts but is starting to have more positive thoughts.

When should I expect my child to feel better?

The time it takes for behavior and feelings to change depends on both the severity of the symptoms of depression and how long your child has been feeling this way. While your child may begin to understand how to manage his or her mood, it can take time for actual changes in mood and behavior to occur. Don't be surprised if you don't see an immediate change. One way to ensure change is to be consistent. When families are busy, it can be hard to find time to talk about how your child is feeling. But it's important to keep practicing the positive thinking and planning that will lead to change. If you don't notice a change, your child may need more help. Remember that there will always be times when your child feels real sadness from events or situations in his or her life. This sadness is normal for all children. As your child learns to manage his or her moods, you should expect difficult times to pass more quickly and that he or she will rejoin favorite activities or find new ones.

Where can I get more information?

Many books have been written for parents and teachers about how to understand and manage the symptoms of childhood depression. The person who provided you with this tip sheet might be able to recommend books relevant to your child's age. If you have access to the Internet, the websites of the following organizations are good sources of information.

www.apa.org

The American Psychological Association's website has a public information section that can help you understand your child's problems or locate a psychologist.

www.nasponline.org

The website of the National Association of School Psychologists contains information about how to get help in public schools and about the role of school psychologists in the diagnostic and treatment processes.

www.ed.gov

Many handouts, booklets, and online resources for parents, teachers, and others who care for and teach children can be found on the Department of Education website. Information about school-based intervention services is also available.

www.aap.org

The "Parenting Corner" on the website of the American Academy of Pediatrics has useful information on a variety of topics related to children's growth and physical and mental development.

What should I do if I don't notice any change or if my child's behavior gets worse?

Think about how consistently you and your child have been about working together on the techniques. Consider using different examples, or try asking more frequently how your child feels about his or her progress. Talk with the person who gave you this tip sheet for more ideas to help your child.

If your child's symptoms of depression become worse, immediately consult with the person who gave you this tip sheet, even if you have a future appointment scheduled.



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