



School Services

School Guide for

Students with

Major Depressive Disorder

What is Major Depressive Disorder?

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a mental health condition that occurs when someone has at least 5 of the following 9 symptoms daily for 2 weeks or more:

- Depressed mood or irritable most of the day, nearly every day
- Decreased interest or pleasure in most activities, most of the day
- Significant weight change (+1-5%) or change in appetite
- Change in sleep, either sleeping too much or too little
- Fatigue, loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of death and/or suicide
- Feeling restless, agitated, or slowed processing
- Difficulty or inability to concentrate and/or make decisions

What are the symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder?

The most common signs are feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness. Students may also present as irritable or restless in the school setting. Feelings of sadness, anxiety, and "empty" feelings are often common. Some students might have suicidal thoughts or attempts, while some might demonstrate non-suicidal, self-injurious behaviors such as "cutting". The student with MDD will often have lower grades than previously and might have difficulty attending school or staying at school all day. It is not uncommon for students with MDD to have aches, pains, headaches, or digestive problems that do not ease with medical treatment.

There are treatments and services to help children with Major Depressive Disorder, such as psychotherapy and psychotropic medications such as antidepressants. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy are two effective therapies for students diagnosed with MDD. Psychotropic medications, specifically antidepressants, primarily work on chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. There are different classes of antidepressants and each particular medication has its own side effects and benefits. It is important to consider that it can take up to 4-6 weeks before the antidepressants have a full effect.

How can Major Depressive Disorder affect School Performance?

Children with a Major Depressive Disorder are at risk of poor academic functioning because of the following:

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Poor relations with peers
- Lack of participation in learning opportunities or other activities
- School avoidance
- Poor Self-esteem

- Behavioral impairment due to their high degree of stress
- Frequently missing class to seek medical attention from school nurse for real or imagined physical ailment
- Poor concentration and inability to focus
- Lower grades than previously earned due to incomplete work, poor work quality, excessive absences
- Lack of motivation in terms of grades, participation, extracurricular activities

How can schools assist students with Major Depressive Disorder?

Academic

- Start academic interventions right away by providing a Section 504 Plan. Consider including the following academic accommodations in the Section 504 plan:
- Extended time to complete work missed due to medical appointments
- Allow extra time to complete class work or projects.
- Assign a moderate work load that emphasizes quality vs. quantity to decrease school related stressors.
- If needed, have a psycho-educational evaluation completed to target academic needs and provide useful accommodations and modifications.

Social/ Emotional

- Provide opportunities for success to improve low self-esteem
- Provide counseling to address psychological or social effects of condition as they arise on campus
- Allow for the use of relaxation skills to cope with anxiety or fear
- Establish a support system-more than one adult on campus that the child can reach out to if necessary
- Provide student with access to support person(s) in times of crisis or stress.

Often a student with Major Depressive Disorder is working with a mental health professional such as a therapist, psychologist, and/or psychiatrist. Working with the medical team and the child's parents in unity will bring about the most successful outcomes for the student.

Resources

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
www.aacap.org *National Institute of Mental Health* www.nimh.nih.gov
Substance abuse and mental health services administration
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>
www.kidshealth.org
www.medicine.net

School Services Department

Children's HealthSM
 Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733
 Plano Campus: 469-303-4418