NEWS FROM YOUR PEER LIAISON

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Winter Blues: Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and Depression

For some children, the change in season brings with it a shift in mood. Is it a passing phase, or something more serious? Here's what you need to know about depression, SAD, and your child.

Depression can be a serious problem for adults and children alike. Regardless of the season, shifts in a child's mood and/or attitude are not something to ignore or dismiss. What appears to be a teenager's newly developed bad attitude could actually be a case of depression or, in some instances, Seasonal Affective Disorder. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)—often referred to as "winter depression"—is a subtype of depression that follows a seasonal pattern. The most common form of SAD occurs in winter, although some people do experience symptoms during spring and summer.

As winter approaches, 10 to 20 percent of us begin to suffer mild symptoms of SAD. We are saddened by the shortening days, climb into bed earlier and resent waking up when the morning light grows dim. For 14 million Americans, these symptoms grow considerably worse as winter progresses.

People with SAD may crave comfort foods, including simple carbs such as pasta, breads, and sugar. With excess unhealthy calories and a lack of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, fatigue often sets in. They may become depressed and irritable. Eventually, they are no longer able to maintain their regular lifestyle. They may withdrawal socially and no longer enjoy things that used to be fun. It's as if a person's batteries have just run down. For parents, SAD can obviously have a sharp impact on the ability to be effective parent. Children and adolescents can also suffer these symptoms. They may experience feelings of low self-worth and hopelessness. Children with depression struggle to concentrate on their schoolwork. Their grades may drop, worsening feelings of low self-esteem. Symptoms that last more than two weeks are cause for concern. Spring and summer SAD is characterized by anxiety, insomnia, irritability, and weight loss. The symptoms more closely resemble mania than depression.

No Known Cause

Researchers have not pinpointed what causes SAD. There is some evidence pointing to a disruption of a person's "circadian rhythm" — the body's natural cycle of sleeping and waking. As the days shorten, the decreasing amount of light can throw off the body's natural clock, triggering depression. Sunlight also plays a role in the brain's production of melatonin and serotonin. During winter, your body produces more melatonin (which encourages sleep) and less serotonin (which fights depression). Researchers do not know why some people are more susceptible to SAD than others

"In general, SAD is a better-recognized disorder in adults because so many children's mental health disorders emerge over time," says Dr. Spratt. "Diagnosing SAD in a child is not easy, because determining the pattern of depression takes time. A doctor will typically attempt to determine whether a child is suffering from depression or anxiety first, then look at the pattern over time."

In order to diagnose SAD, doctors need to perform a medical exam to rule out other possible causes of the symptoms, such as hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, or mononucleosis. Doctors can administer questionnaires to determine mood and also to look for a seasonal pattern. "It's difficult to diagnose children with depression in the first place, because it often presents as irritability, and they have a hard time understanding terms like 'sad mood' or 'feeling blue,'" says Dr. Spratt. She points out that one of the most telling markers of depression in children is anhedonia — which means "absence of pleasure." "So a good screening question to ask children is, 'When was the last time you had a really good time?'"

Treating SAD

Several effective treatments can help sufferers of SAD. Simply bringing more sunlight into your life can treat mild cases. Spend time outdoors everyday, even on cloudy days. Open window shades in your home. Exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet, one low in simple carbohydrates and high in vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.

People with SAD sometimes find that their symptoms go away when they travel in or move to more Southern latitudes. If possible, plan a mid-winter family vacation in a sunny climate.

As with adults, depression in children can be addressed effectively. "Depression is very treatable with medication and therapy," says Dr. Spratt. "There are several evidence-based studies showing that cognitive behavioral therapy is effective in treating depression in kids."

For severe cases of SAD in adults, several treatment options exist. The most common treatment is light therapy. Patients sit for up to three hours in front of strong light boxes or wear light visors, with UV rays filtered out. However, light therapy is not recommended for children, says Dr. Spratt. "I know of no evidence-based studies showing light therapy to work for children, and I have never recommended it for children," she says.

Upcoming Events

January 6th: Union County Area Adoption/Foster Support Group: Building Bridges: Educational Advocacy 101 6:30-8:30 pm. Crest Baptist Church 1211 Poplar St. Creston

January 22nd: Pella Area Foster/Adoptive Group: Handling a Behavior Crisis 6-8 pm. Federated Fellowship Church 309 Roosevelt St. Pella Child care is provided.

February 19th: Wapello County Support Group: Preparing for a Placement 6-8 pm. First Lutheran Church 126 N. Jefferson Ottumwa. Child care available RSVP to Candice at cyork@ifapa.org

IFAPA Spring Conference March 6 & 7th Adventureland Inn—Altoona REGISTER online www.IFAPA.org

Working Through It Together

Parents of children with depression should participate in their child's treatment and recovery. Learn about the disorder and share what you learn with your child. Make sure your child completes his treatment everyday, no matter what form your doctor prescribes.

Plan low-key quality time together. Your child won't have the energy for an arcade, but reading a book or playing a family board game can be fun. Encourage your child to get exercise and spend time outdoors. Plan daily walks together. Fix healthy meals for your family, and establish a set bedtime to ensure he gets enough sleep and the same amount of sleep every night.

Your fatigued child will probably need help with his homework. Take time to work through schoolwork together, and communicate your child's situation to his teachers. Be patient with your child and reassure him that these issues will get better.

Whether noticing symptoms of SAD in yourself or depression in your child, take it seriously. Treating this disorder early and diligently can turn the dark days of winter into a pleasant time of togetherness for your family. (Taken from http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Winter-Blues-Seasonal-Affective-Disorder-and-Depression.aspx)

DHS PAYMENT SCHEDULE

• Payments to foster families and adoptive families are available for worker approval on the first business day of each month. The payments are mailed out of Central office two business days after the approval occurs. Payments issued via direct deposit are issued two business days after the approval occurs, and are deposited into the account three banking days after issuance.

• Arrangements are made in local offices to ensure staff approves payments timely.

• Below is an approximate schedule for payments for the rest of the fiscal year. Please know these dates can vary. If you do not have your check within five days of the approximate delivery date, please contact your social worker or subsidy worker. If you don't know who your subsidy worker is, you can contact your local DHS office and you will be given contact information.

Date payment available for worker approval	Date payment would be mailed if approved on 1st business day	Date payment would be deposited in bank account when paid via electronic funds transfer approved on 1st business day.
1/2/15	1/6/15	1/9/15
2/2/15	2/4/15	2/9/15
3/2/15	3/4/15	3/9/15
4/1/15	4/3/15	4/8/15
5/1/15	5/5/15	5/8/15
6/1/15	6/3/15	6/8/15