

Understanding Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that occurs at certain times of the year. Kids and teens with SAD tend to feel depressed in the fall and winter when days are shorter and it gets darker earlier. As the seasons change and the days become longer, the symptoms usually improve or go away.



Signs and Symptoms of SAD

Seasonal Affective Disorder SAD symptoms appear during the months with fewer daylight hours and can affect how children and teens feel and act. These symptoms can include:

- ✓ **Changes in Mood.** Kids may feel sad, irritable, hopeless, or discouraged. They might cry more than usual or get upset easily.
- ✓ **Negative Thinking.** Children and teens may become more self-critical, sensitive to criticism, or blame others more often.
- ✓ **Loss of Interest.** They might not want to hang out with friends or engage in activities they usually enjoy.
- ✓ **Low Energy.** Kids with SAD may feel very tired or have little energy, making it hard to complete tasks.
- ✓ **Changes in Sleep.** They may sleep more than usual and struggle to wake up for school.
- ✓ **Eating Habits.** Some kids might crave sugary snacks or high-carb foods, leading to overeating and weight gain. Others may lose their appetite.
- ✓ **Trouble Focusing.** SAD can make concentrating on schoolwork difficult, affecting grades.
- ✓ **Suicidal Thoughts.** In some cases, SAD may cause thoughts of death, self-harm, or not wanting to live.

As spring arrives and the days grow longer, children with SAD often regain energy and feel more positive.

What Causes SAD?

The combination of lower serotonin and higher melatonin levels may lead to SAD.

- ✓ **Serotonin:** Exposure to sunlight increases serotonin, which helps improve mood and well-being. Less sunlight may lower serotonin levels, leading to depression.
- ✓ **Melatonin:** Darkness triggers melatonin production, making a person feel sleepy. Shorter days and longer nights in fall and winter can increase melatonin, causing fatigue.

How You Can Help



Encourage Outdoor Activities. Physical activity, especially outside, can help improve mood.



Serve Nutritious Foods. Encourage a balanced diet rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.



Spend Quality Time Together. Enjoy low-energy activities like watching movies.



Maintain a Regular Sleep Schedule. Encourage consistent bedtimes and wake times to maximize exposure to natural light.



Organize Schoolwork. Help manage homework and consider asking teachers for flexible deadlines if needed.



Be Patient. Recovery may take time, so offer understanding and support.

If your child or teen has SAD, explain that it's seasonal. So even though it could happen each year, there are things that help if it does. Talk about how SAD will get better, even though it may seem hard right now.

Getting Additional Help

If you're worried about your child, take it seriously and have a talk right away. You also can find help anytime at:

- ✓ **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988 for immediate support.
- ✓ **SAMHSA Helpline:** Call 800-662-HELP (4357) for local resources or text your zip code to 435748 (HELP4U).
- ✓ **The Trevor Lifeline** (LGBTQ support): Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678.
- ✓ **Crisis Text Line:** Text "HOME" to 741741.