

And Now From The Wellness Corner...Healthy Discussions

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Holidays are upon us and the season brings up a lot of feelings. It is a time of joy, hopefulness, and remembrance. December is supposed to be festive, but sometimes there exists a discrepancy between the joy that others are feeling and the sadness that one feels on the inside. There is often a sense of loss and abandonment during this time of year and it can be emotionally exhausting.

We are living in an intense time. We continue to see violence and tragedies in schools across the country. We still have to adapt to the current circumstances. Many people thought the pandemic was going one way, only to realize there are more variants emerging and still some vaccine hesitancy remains. Teens have ongoing stress about completing schoolwork, getting good grades, trying to fit in socially, and worrying about the future.

As winter approaches, some of us may experience the “winter blues” – feeling sad from shortening days, fewer hours of sunshine, cloudy skies, cold and damp weather. We might find ourselves climbing into bed earlier and resenting waking up on dark mornings.

This is different from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is a form of depression that starts in late fall and goes away in the spring and summer. Some people call it “winter depression.” It is the most common form of SAD. In general, SAD is a better-recognized disorder for adults and college age students because so many children’s mental health disorders emerge over time. However, there are some important things to look out for now.

When experiencing SAD, a person may withdraw socially and no longer enjoy things that used to be fun. They **feel tired, oversleep and lack energy**. It’s as if a person’s batteries have just run down.

People often have a **bigger appetite than usual and crave comfort foods**, including rice, pasta, breads, and sugar such as candies and pastries. With excess unhealthy calories and a lack of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, **fatigue often sets in, leading to increased sleepiness and weight gain**. People also feel anxious and irritable.

It is thought that SAD may be attributed to a disruption of a person’s melatonin, serotonin, and “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.

Depressed people feel down most of the time for at least 2 weeks. They also have at least 1 of these 2 symptoms:

- **They no longer enjoy or care about doing the things they used to like to do.**
- **They feel sad, down, hopeless, or cranky most of the day, almost every day.**

Whether noticing symptoms of SAD in yourself or 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.

Here are some ways you can do that:

1. Make sure you get exposed to as much light as possible.
 - *Get outside! Take walks outside during the day, so that you get some sun.
 - *Expose your eyes to natural light for one hour each day
 - *In your bedroom, open the drapes and blinds in order to let in natural light.
2. Follow good sleep habits
 - *Go to bed and get up at the same time every day
 - *Have coffee or tea only in the morning, not in the afternoon.
 - *Keep your bedroom dark, cool, quiet, and free of reminders of work or other things that cause you stress
 - *Avoid looking at phones or reading devices that give off light before bed. This can make it harder to fall asleep
3. Exercise several days a week, but not right before bed.
4. Counseling can help!

Remember, you as a caregiver are the most important person in your child's life. You are the main attachment, the one who cares for them. There are things you can do to help them.

If your child ever feels like they might hurt themselves or someone else, do one of these things:

- Call your doctor or nurse and tell them it is an emergency or dial 9-1-1
- Go to the emergency room at your local hospital
- Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline available 24hour a day: 1-800-273-8255
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

National Crisis Text Line: Text TALK to 741-741, available 24/7

San Mateo County Teen Crisis Services Monday – Thursday, 4:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Teen Text Line: 650-747-6463

Teen Chat: sanmateocrisis.org

