

Mood Disorders

in Children & Teens

When a child or teen is struggling with mood dysregulation, families are thrust into a world they never expected to navigate. Questions come quickly, and so does the hope that the right treatment will make everything better. But, if you are new to learning about mental health and the mental healthcare system, this can be a confusing and anxiety inducing

Community does not mean having all the answers. It means having people beside you who understand the questions.

ABOUT CMHRC

CMHRC exists because families and their providers deserve better access to information, resources, and expert guidance as they seek accurate diagnosis and effective treatment. CMHRC is led by and for families living with mental illness. With decades of combined experience as both mental health professionals and as families surviving and thriving with mental illness, CMHRC brings a unique and essential perspective to mental health services. Children's Mental Health Resource Center provides parent groups, education for providers, and community building to support you and your family's mental health. Share your experience. Accept support. Let others who have walked this path help light the way — because together, families are stronger, more hopeful, and better equipped to give their children what they truly need.



GUIDANCE. COMMUNITY. HOPE.

COMMON QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What is a mood disorder?

“Mood disorder” is a general term for a category of mental health conditions that cause moods to change involuntarily and disrupt quality of life.

What are some examples of mood disorders?

Examples include:

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Persistent Depressive Disorder
- Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Thermoregulatory Sleep Dysregulation Disorder (known as FOH) — a newly recognized phenotype of Bipolar Disorder

Isn't it normal for children and teens to have mood changes?

YES Children and teens do naturally have moods that change easily. The difference is that with a mood disorder, these mood changes aren't connected to what's going on around them and you won't be able to see anything that could have caused the mood to change. They probably don't even know why their mood changed because the shifts are driven by involuntary changes in brain chemical production, absorption, and availability.

Are mood disorders common in children and teens?

YES Estimates suggest that up to 18% of children experience a mood episode before age 18. That's close to 1 in 5 children, and more than 10% of them experience severe impairment.

Does early diagnosis and treatment make a difference?

YES Early diagnosis and intervention are the best tools we have to support long-term stability throughout the lifespan. An accurate diagnosis and effective treatment can reduce symptom intensity and frequency, and improve quality of life today and in the future.

Treatment

Treatment for mood disorders are like a three legged stool. Each leg is equally important in supporting stability and without one the stool will fall over. The three pillars of treatment for mood disorders are medication, therapy, and lifestyle interventions.

The kind of medications used in treatment will vary depending upon the diagnosis. Medications may include SSRI or SNRI antidepressant medications for depression, mood stabilizers for bipolar and manic symptoms, and antipsychotic medications to treat psychosis and other detachments from reality. Therefore an accurate diagnosis is essential since it will dictate the medications prescribed.

Therapy may include different kinds of psychotherapy such as talk, play, music, or equine therapies. Occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy may also be useful depending on the child's needs.

Lifestyle interventions may include circadian rhythm resets, temperature regulation, changes in parenting approaches, symptom tracking, exercise and movement, and nutritional therapies like metabolic ketogenic therapy that can provide low-risk, high-reward, at-home strategies that can reduce symptoms and improve quality of life.

Early diagnosis and intervention combined with a comprehensive treatment plan, professional support, and at-home interventions means having a mood disorder doesn't need to hold anyone back from living long and fulfilling lives.

How We Can Help

- [Wayfinder Service](#)
- [Palliative Parenting™](#)
- [Ketogenic Therapy Programs](#)
- [CMHRC Toolkit](#)