
Discharge Instructions: Mood Disorders in Children

Your child has been diagnosed with a mood disorder. A mood disorder is a serious mental health condition. A child with a mood disorder has intense feelings that are hard to manage. They may have ongoing feelings of sadness or despair, low self-esteem, or trouble with relationships. The child may have severe mood swings, sleep problems, or a hard time focusing. They may even talk about wanting to die.

There are different types of mood disorders. Some common ones are major depression, persistent depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder. Your child's healthcare provider can tell you more about your child's mood disorder. Take note that children may show different symptoms than adults. It depends on their age and the type of mood disorder.

Treatment will depend on your child's symptoms, age, and health. It will also depend on how bad the disorder is. Psychological treatments, like talk therapy, can teach your child how to better manage their emotions. Your child's healthcare provider may also prescribe certain medicines to help with symptoms.

Home care

You play a key role in your child's treatment. Here are things you can do to help:

- Learn all you can about your child's mood disorder. Tell your child's healthcare provider about any medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, minerals, or supplements your child takes. If your child uses alcohol or illegal drugs, let the healthcare provider know.
- Take part in family therapy as needed. You can learn ways to better deal with your child's behavior.
- Set up a home environment that supports your child and lets them share any concerns. Being able to share concerns about peers, teachers, or other adults will keep your child safe.
- Support your child. Don't discount their feelings.
- In an age-appropriate manner, help your child and their siblings understand the mood disorder.
- Monitor your child's social media activity. Watch for any signs of bullying.
- If you have trouble paying for your child's medicines, ask their healthcare provider for possible resources to help with the costs.
- Talk with your child's healthcare provider about other providers who will be included in your child's care. Your child may get care from a team that may include counselors, therapists, social workers, psychologists, school personnel, and psychiatrists. The care team that will be needed will depend on your child's needs and the severity of the disorder.
- Make sure your child takes their medicines as directed. If your child has side effects, tell your child's healthcare provider right away. Never change the medicine dose, stop medicines, or use another person's prescription.

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- Talk with your child's healthcare provider before giving vitamins, minerals, supplements, or any other home remedies to your child.
 - Mood disorders can have a serious impact on your child's school experience. Educate your child's school and any other caregivers about your child's mood disorder. They can help with treatment by working with you and your child.
 - Watch your child for signs of suicidal thoughts and behavior. Take all symptoms of suicide very seriously. Seek treatment right away.
 - Take care of yourself. Reach out for support if you need it. Being in touch with other parents or caregivers who have a child with a mood disorder may be helpful. Also ask your child's healthcare provider or school staff for resources to help your family.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your child's healthcare provider as directed. Make sure your child doesn't miss any appointments with their therapist or other mental health provider.

When to seek medical care

Children with mood disorders are more at risk for self-harm, including suicide. Call your child's healthcare provider right away if your child:

- Feels extreme depression, fear, anxiety, or anger toward themselves or others
- Feels out of control
- Hears voices that others don't hear
- Sees things that others don't see
- Can't sleep or eat for 3 days in a row
- Has symptoms that get worse
- Has new symptoms
- Shows behavior that concerns friends, family, or teachers

Call or text 988 if your child has suicidal thoughts, a plan to harm themselves or others, and the means to carry out the plan.

When you call or text 988, you will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Lifeline is free and available 24/7.