

Health Care

Even children can suffer from depression

But the Child and Adolescent Clinic can help

Imagine this—your 12-year-old, usually a happy-go-lucky child, has suddenly morphed into a different person. She develops stomach aches just before school, doesn't want to see her friends, growls at everything you say, picks at her favourite foods, and wants to sleep all day long. Should you sigh and resign yourself to about four or five years of teenage angst or should you look a little closer at the cause of this new personality?

While all of the above characteristics can be a normal part of the transition from childhood to adolescence, they may also be signs of depression. Everyone goes through periods of 'the blues' that are fairly short-lived. Sadness in response to a major life event such as a death or divorce is also to be expected. Depression, however, is more severe and long-lasting and can become a serious illness if left untreated.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Program at William Osler Health Centre provides both inpatient and outpatient services. The hospital's outpatient Child and Adolescent Clinic sees about 1,000 children each year ranging in age from as young as 3 years up to 18 years. About 18 per cent are diagnosed with affective disorders, including depression.

Dr. Uma Sreenivasan, Clinical Director, says the illness is difficult to diagnose in young children since they don't show their feelings in the same way as adults or older teenagers.

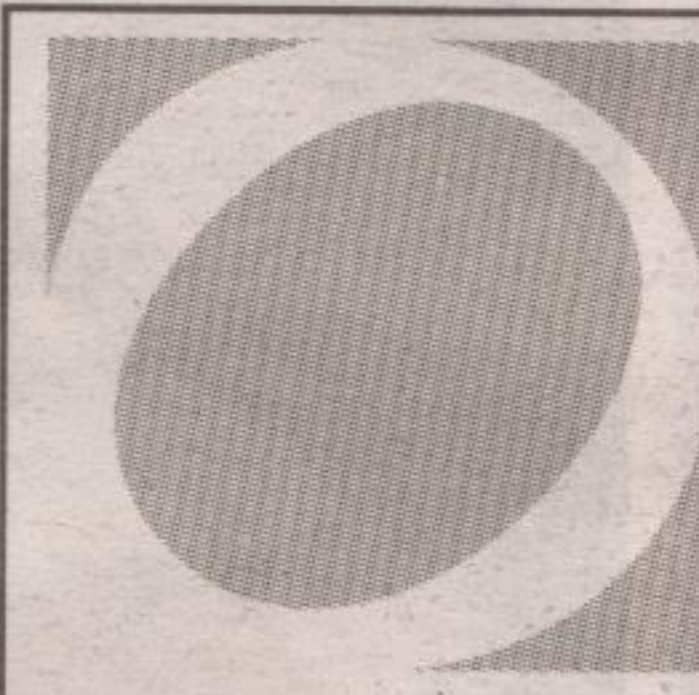
"We look for changes in behaviour," she says. "Depression in children can often manifest itself as irritability. Or they may seem sad, but not all the time as an adult might be."

In young children, the trigger is usually an external disruption or stress in their lives, such as divorce, death, or family conflict. In these situations, recovery may be 'spontaneous' as the child matures or adjusts to the external situation over a few months.

Older children, like

preventing depression.

Cognitive behavioural therapy, which involves helping people to



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look at themselves and the world differently, is an effective form of treatment today.

Dr. Sreenivasan says, "People with clinical depression often have a low opinion of themselves or have distorted ideas of how the world is treating them. Enabling them to see and correct these misperceptions helps them feel and think more positively. With a more positive outlook comes improved self-esteem and the realization that it is possible to control one's own actions, thoughts and emotions to a great extent.

At Osler's Child and Adolescent Clinic, the focus is on the family as a whole. In fact, much of the counselling is with parents or family discussion groups. Parents can help a child deal with depression by giving affection and reassurance, helping children relax, and lowering their own demands and expectations.

As Dr. Sreenivasan says, "Home should be a soft place, providing the environment to recover and grow."

Statements made in the Osler Health Connection column are for general information only. Please consult your physician for personal medical advice. If you have comments on this column, please call the hospital's community contact line at (905) 494-2120, ext. 22505 or e-mail us at oslerconnection@oslerhc.org

adults, can become depressed either as a result of external events or because they have a biological inclination. Sometimes, the illness may be so enduring and severe that it damages self-esteem, causes serious problems at school or at home, and may even lead to suicide. When psychotherapy is not enough, there are medications to help manage mood disorders.

Dr. Sreenivasan says drugs are sometimes necessary and useful but emphasizes that they should only be part of comprehensive treatment. She believes that psychological support and working things out through discussion are key to treating and



Leaf helps raise 25K

The Halton Hills Chapter of the Spinal Cord Society is \$25,000 richer following the efforts of Wayne MacDonald's annual Spinal Cord Golf Tournament at Eagle Ridge Golf Course. Toronto Maple Leaf Matt Stajan (left) joined MacDonald as the tourney got underway last week. A total of 124 golfers took part and with this year's effort, the tournament has surpassed \$100,000 raised for the Spinal Cord Society over its four year history.

Photo by Ted Brown

Go-Kart Challenge to aid Huntington Society research

Great Gulf Homes has teamed up with the Huntington Society of Canada and Formula Kartways for this year's Indy Go-Kart Challenge on Sept. 26 to raise money for those with Huntington's Disease—a fatal, hereditary brain disorder.

"I can tell you that individuals and families affected by HD in our community and all across Canada benefit enormously from proceeds of this terrific event," says Judy Lang, volunteer organizer. "The Indy is a fun endurance race geared for all skill and competitive levels."

Participants can join the race by putting together a team of up to four go-kart drivers, or by simply making a donation. For pledge sheets or more information, contact Lang at raceforacure@msn.com or the Huntington Society of Canada's office at 1-800-998-7398.

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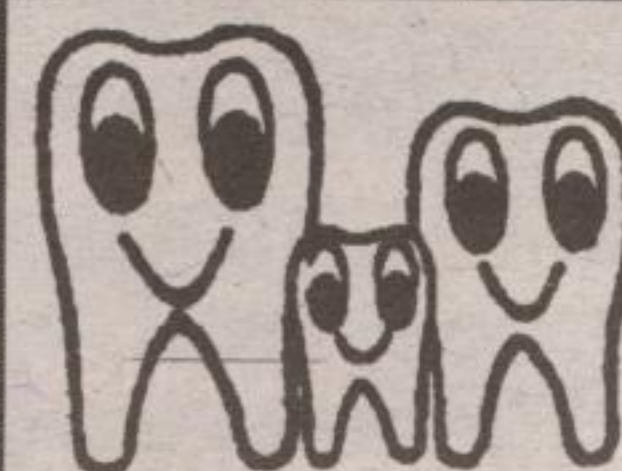
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