

**General Effects:** Many children exhibit symptoms of depression even if they do not have an official diagnosis. These symptoms can persist in different aspects of the child's life and over time, or can be more short-term after a difficult change or life event. Here are some tips for supporting a Little who has depressive symptoms.

**Signs and Symptoms include:**

- Irritability or anger
- Continuous feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Social withdrawal
- Increased sensitivity to rejection
- Change in appetite or sleep
- Outburst of screaming or crying
- Difficulty concentrating

- Fatigue or low energy
- Reduced ability to function during events and activities at home or with friends, in school, extracurricular activities, and in other hobbies or interests
- Impaired thinking or concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Physical complaints

**Advice for Mentors:**

***Make the effort to show that you care through word choice, actions, and encouragement.***

- Focus on the positives. Explain to your Little what they are doing well. Provide lots of positive encouragement.
- Show your Little that you care by keeping in touch on a regular basis and showing excitement during your time together. Openly communicate, express flaws, and show vulnerability in appropriate ways. This will allow your Little to understand that you care and relate to your behaviors.
- Do not discourage a Little from expressing sadness or negative emotions. By appearing uncomfortable or changing topics too quickly, you can reinforce the idea that they should not be feeling sad or that it is not okay to express. Be an active listener and remain supportive, but don't feel the need to have any answers.

***Help your Little feel confident in their ways.***

- It is important to keep them active as this is directly related to happiness. Encourage your Little to participate in things they are interested in and compliment them on a job well done. This will allow a Little to understand positive self-worth and a sense of competence.
- Encourage a Little to get out of the house as much as possible.
- Have a Little come up with different activities you can do together and show them that you are excited to do them together.

***Always avoid shame and punishment and provide positive reinforcement.***

- Create a safe environment for the child where they can thrive and be successful; avoid excessive competition and activities that may make them feel inadequate.
- Do not partake in activities that require too many rules and regulations.
- It is never appropriate to yell, scream or excessively condone. In some cases it is important to be assertive, but strive to do this in a way that recognizes your Little's positive behavior. When coping with disruptive behavior on an outing, stay calm. Ask your Little to explain their thought process and intended outcomes. Probe and reflect without judgment. Lightly encourage a positive disposition to conclude.
- You may understand why the child is depressed, but it is not your role to fix the situation. By focusing on the associated behaviors, you may create an uncomfortable mentoring relationship. Focus on our Little's strengths, not deficits.

***Partner with the guardian(s).***

- Some Littles' depressive symptoms may be triggered by certain events, situations or times of year. Get to know your Little's triggers and seek guidance from their guardian.
- Take the time to describe your Little's struggles with a guardian. Knowledge of behaviors will inform all concerned adults in their life.