



Depression of Infancy and Early Childhood

Fact Sheet

Summer 2009

Condition Description

Depression of Infancy and Early Childhood is a formal mental health diagnosis given to an infant or toddler by a licensed mental health professional using the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition (DC:0-3R). The diagnosis requires the following five conditions:

- The emotional and behavioral pattern represents a change from the child's typical emotional and behavioral displays;
- The depressed or irritable mood must be persistent everyday for most of the day over two weeks;
- The depressed symptoms occur in more than one activity and within more than one relationship;
- The symptoms cause the child distress, impair functioning and/or impede the child's development;
- The symptoms are not due to a general medical condition or the effect of medication or environmental toxin. ¹

Impact on Learning and Development

If untreated, young children with depression of infancy and early childhood may experience delays in development and demonstrate difficulties in their relationships with others. They may also demonstrate difficulties in later school achievement and develop behaviors that require juvenile corrections interventions.^{2,3}

Treatment Options

While the research surrounding effective treatment options is minimal, experts in the

field recommend a combination of psychotherapy and parent education. ⁴ Additionally, as with all interventions targeted toward young children, consistent and frequent communication across all of the systems working with the child (the child's primary care givers, child care providers, primary health care providers, mental health providers, etc.), is essential for optimal success in treatment.⁵

References

- ¹ Zero to Three (2005). Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.
- ² Zigler, E., Taussig, C., & Black, K. (1992). Early childhood intervention: A promising preventative for juvenile delinquency. *American Psychologist*, 47(8), 997-1006.
- ³ President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). Goal 4: Early mental health screening, assessment and referral to services are common practice. *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*. 57-66.
- ⁴ Witten, M. R. (1997). Mood disorder: Depression of infancy and early childhood. In A. Lieberman, S. Wieder & E. Fenichel (Eds.), *DC: 0-3 Case Book* (pp.81-107). Washington, D. C.: ZERO TO THREE.
- ⁵ Parlakian, P. and Seibel, N.L. (2002). *Building Strong Foundations, Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers*. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.