



By Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

Questions from readers

Question:

My 8 year old son seems to have the perfect life, but he is unhappy and negative most of the time. He has two parents who love him, numerous friends and achieves well in virtually everything he does. Is it possible for an 8-year-old to be depressed?

Answer:

The prevalence of depression among both children and adults appears to have increased 10 to 20 fold over the past 50 years. This is probably due to cultural factors and parenting style, rather than any genetic or biochemical causes. The response to your question is that childhood depression in 8-year-olds is not uncommon today.

Consult with your physician about obtaining a referral to a mental health professional who specializes in working with young children. While medication can initially be very effective for some youngsters, I would advise against it unless your child is in a severe crisis. A more appropriate approach would be working with a therapist who utilizes [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) to change the underlying thought processes of these depressed youngsters.

Question:

We bought a computer for our teenage son to use it in his bedroom. We established some ground rules, including the fact that he would not visit sexually explicit sites. We recently found out that he has been spending a great deal of time on some of these websites.

Many kids in my generation looked at *Playboy* and other similar magazines, so I find it hard to punish my son for doing something that is quite common among adolescent boys. How should we handle this?

Answer:

Your son agreed to the ground rules and violated them. If you don't follow through with some actions, you lose all credibility that your rules have any meaning. Second, some of the sexually explicit websites available to teens are quite different from the rather "mild" pictures available in *Playboy* of previous generations.

Remove the computer from his room and put it in a public setting. This communicates to your son that rules have consequences and that you won't tolerate his visiting websites that you feel are harmful to his development.

Question:

Our friends have a preschool child who is the same age as my daughter. While this couple is our best friend, the girls have never gotten along very well. My daughter said she doesn't like to play with our friend's daughter, but does very well with other children. How do I get my daughter to learn to get along with this child as I don't want to endanger our friendship with this wonderful family?

Answer:

If these people are really such good friends, why don't you try being honest with them? Tell them that the connection between the kids does not seem to be good, and that at least for awhile you want to minimize their contact. True friends would be understanding and appreciative of that approach. I don't see any reason why you should force your daughter to become friends with someone she doesn't like.

Gregory Ramey, Ph.D., is a child psychologist and vice president for outpatient services at The Children's Medical Center of Dayton. For more of his columns, visit www.childrensdayton.org/ramey.