

# DEPRESSION AND AUTISM

Navigating depression with your child can be tricky and sometimes overwhelming. There are medication and cognitive-behavioral therapy options for treating adolescents with depression. For more information on medication options, speak to your child's pediatrician. Here we provide you with some resources to get started in seeking treatment and resources for depression.

## THERAPY OPTIONS

**Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** is a problem-solving, goal-directed therapy that examines and treats the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are present in those with depression and preventing adaptive coping. CBT is an empirically-supported treatment for generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and phobias, as well as depression. These treatments typically occur on an outpatient basis with weekly sessions with a licensed professional. Activities in between sessions and parental involvement are key components in helping a child learn the skills and generalize them across environments.

Cognitive behavioral therapy may not be the right fit for all adolescents. Instead, the focus may simply be **Behavioral Therapy**. Sticking to a behavioral approach may benefit teens with lower cognitive functioning or difficulty following the tasks in a CBT setting. Strategies for addressing anxiety using a behavioral approach include use of social stories, visual schedules, "if-then" boards, and more. Speak with your child's behavioral therapist to discuss which strategies may benefit your child.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF CBT IS A GOOD FIT FOR MY CHILD?

**Motivation to Participate** – the majority of the work (e.g., exposures, generalization) is done out of the session from week to week. If the individual refuses to participate, parent training can occur but waiting until the child is more willing is sometimes necessary.

**Any Co-occurring Conditions** – if your child is not able to attend to the material even with breaks and activities infused or if their language level impacts their ability to understand the material, other interventions might have to be considered first.

**Level of Cognitive Functioning** – cognitive skills necessary for non-adapted forms of CBT include emotion recognition, self-reflection, and meta-cognition (i.e., thinking about thinking), perspective taking, verbal ability, short-and long-term memory, and causal reasoning.

**Parental Involvement** – many individuals need assistance with generalizing the skills learned in session, particularly individuals with ASD. Parents might be asked to participate in all or parts of the sessions and homework, depending on the adolescent's functioning level.

## HOW DO I FIND A THERAPIST WHO TREATS DEPRESSION?

Ask your pediatrician or developmental and behavioral pediatrician for a referral to a therapist who provides therapy adolescents with depression, and who has experience working with individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

To search for providers in your area, enter your zip code at <https://therapists.psychologytoday.com>. Through this resource, you can select "Cognitive Behavioral (CBT)" under Treatment Orientation, and filter by issues, insurance, age, autism specialty, etc., as well as read the profiles of potential therapists.

The following list are providers who have identified as being specialized in treating depression in autistic individuals:

1. **Jennifer Miller MA, LMFT** in Folsom. She specializes in adolescent and adult depression treatment. She is comfortable with treating depression when there are co-occurring diagnostic concerns such as Anxiety, ADHD, and high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. Website: [jennifermillermft.com](http://jennifermillermft.com). Phone: 916.693.0413.
2. **Kimberly Miller, PhD** in Midtown. She specializes in child and adolescent cognitive-behavioral therapy for those with clinically significant anxiety disorders and/or depression. She also provides assessment, diagnosis, and treatment services for children with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Website: [healthymindsacramento.com](http://healthymindsacramento.com). Phone: 916.694.2969.
3. **Tanda Almont, PsyD** in Roseville. She specializes in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for children with depression, anxiety, and/or ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Website: [monarchcenter.net](http://monarchcenter.net). Email: [dralmont@monarchcenter.net](mailto:dralmont@monarchcenter.net)
4. **Josina Moak, PsyD** In Roseville. She specializes in cognitive-behavioral therapy for teens and adults with depression, anxiety, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder. She also provides psychological testing to these populations as well. Website: [www.drjosinamoak.com](http://www.drjosinamoak.com). Phone: 916-580-5130.
5. **Greenhouse Therapy** with offices in Elk Grove and Sacramento as well as in-home and community therapy options. Greenhouse provides individual, couples, family, and group therapy. They are also specialized in treating mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression) in individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability). They provide these services to children, adolescents, and adults. Website: <http://www.greenhousetherapy.net/> Phone: 916.400.0297.
6. **Judith Hill-Weld, LMFT** in Nevada City. She specializes in providing cognitive-behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and family systems therapy to individuals ages 5-adult with depression in addition to those with developmental disabilities. Website: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/judith-hill-weld-nevada-city-ca/64663> Phone: 530-265-9450.
7. **Shabana Soomar, MS, PhD** in Davis/Sacramento. She specializes in providing cognitive-behavioral therapy for those with depression and autism spectrum disorder. Website: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/shabana-soomar-davis-ca/830164>. Phone: 916.237.9929.
8. **Salatha Helton, LMFT** in Sacramento. She provides cognitive behavioral therapy for youth with depression and autism spectrum disorder. Website: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/salatha-helton-sacramento-ca/709394?sid=602d924675d31&name=Salatha+Helton&ref=1&tr=ResultsName>. Phone: 916.249.6917.
9. **Sarah Jeffryes, LMFT (Head Heart Hands Counseling)** in Fair Oaks. She provides cognitive behavioral therapy for youth with depression. Website: <https://www.headhearhandscounseling.com> Phone: 916-534-8558.
10. **Rogers Behavioral Health** throughout California and other select states. Rogers' has a unique program focused on treating anxiety, mood, OCD, depression, and related disorders in youth ages 6-18 with autism spectrum disorder. Website: <https://rogersbh.org/what-we-treat/care-kids-autism-spectrum-disorder>. Phone: 800-767-4411.

## OTHER RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

### BOOKS

*Understanding Teenage Depression* by Maureen Empfield & Nicholas Bakalar

*Monochrome Days: A First-hand Account of One Teenager's Experience with Depression* by Cait Irwin

*If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder: An Essential Resource for Parents* by Dwight Evans & Linda Wasmer Andrews