

# When Your Child Is Depressed

My daughter is only 8 years old, and she has clinical depression. It was not shocking to hear the therapist say it after a long process of evaluations, but it was still hard to hear. She's so young.

*What did I do wrong?*

*Is it my fault?*

*Is she not happy with our family?*

*Did her first four years living in an orphanage before we adopted her cause it?*

*Is this a result of her having cerebral palsy?*

*Did her biological mother struggle with depression too?*

*Why her?*

These thoughts, these questions, don't ever seem to have an answer. I don't know why she struggles with depression, and I will never know what caused it. All I know is that depression is as real in children as it is in adults. And not many people are talking about it.

With the recent death of Robin Williams, I have seen many great posts about depression. Like my friend Gillian Marchenko's post, where she calls depression the elephant in the room, and how we need to talk about it, it is a great post. **But who is talking about the children? What about children who struggle with depression?**

We adopted our daughter right before her 4th birthday; we noticed her anxiety and her post-traumatic-stress right away. It took a few years for us to accept the reactive-attachments disorder, and even longer to notice the depression.

A few months ago, we began to notice increased negative self talk as a result of minor things. She tripped, "I'm a dummy, I'm such a dummy!" She would accidentally break something, "It's all my fault, all my fault!" If she was disobedient, "Well I ruined everyone's day!" We tried to put a stop to that, reminding her that she was talking about our daughter and we did not want to hear that type of talk, nobody is a dummy, accidents happen, and we all have bad days. Then it escalated and as she screamed and kicked in her room we heard her say, "I should die! Someone should kill me now!"

*How did she even know to say that?*

*How did she think of such dark thoughts?* She was only 7 years old.

"Why did you say that? Where did you hear someone say that?" I tried to ask.

"Nobody said it. I feel it!" she said.

My husband tried to comfort her, and I could hear her cry, "Just let me be dead, just let me be!" And she would not allow us to comfort her, to hug her, to hold her.

Later that night, my husband looked straight at me, "We need to do something. If we don't get her help now, we will have a child that one day commits suicide."

His words chilled my bones, *Oh God not my child!*

The next morning at school, I came to the office to let them know it had been a long night. The secretary asked, "Is everything OK?"

And I started crying, right there in the school office, telling them I was terrified for my child. The secretary came around her desk and gave me a hug, she then sent me to the school psychologist, so she could help me find someone to help my daughter.

“There is a place,” the psychologist said, “that works with kids that are in the foster-care system or have been adopted. It is their specialty, and these are the only kids they see. They specialize in mental-health issues and trauma.”

I left with the information and called right away.

My daughter’s life is complex. She has a background of abandonment, a life lived in an institution, a disability. What specifically has caused her depression? We don’t know, it could be all of it, it could simply be her genetic disposition; we just don’t know. But we do know that it is real, and it affects her life.

So every Thursday we make the drive to see her therapist, we have started neurofeedback, we are using essential oils, supplements, and looking at food sensitivities. Yes, she has more than depression going on. Some people looking at her from the outside may think that cerebral palsy affects her life the most, and while it does affect her, it is her mental health that she struggles with every day. It is the big challenge we face with her every single day. Some days are good, some days are hard, some days are brutal. Some weeks are bad.

But we are making progress. We hear less negative self-talk now, and her demeanor doesn’t normally convey depression. If you asked her, she does not feel sad most of the time.

Children struggle with depression too, it is an elephant in the room, and we need to start talking about it to break the stigma, the shame, the isolation.

My child has clinical depression—a mental-health issue—and there is no shame in that.

Don’t miss the post, *When Children Have Mental Health Issues* for more on this topic, statistics, and research.

*Adapted from Ellen Stumbo’s blog at . Ellen is a pastor’s*

wife, and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.