

An illustration of a woman with dark hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, brown shorts, and black sneakers with white laces. She is lying on her back on a green grassy hill, with her hands behind her head. The background is a bright blue sky with a textured, painterly appearance. There are several orange butterflies scattered throughout the scene, including one in the top left corner and several on the grass.

Sometimes When

I'm Sad

Deborah Serani, Psy.D.
illustrated by Kyra Teis

Sometimes When

I'm
Said



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free spirit
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For Nicole

Sometimes when I'm sad, I cry.





Sometimes I even throw my toys.

Sometimes I hide.

HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH SADNESS

A Guide for Caring Adults

The theme of this book is sadness in childhood. We all know that children get sad, and that sadness can be experienced differently by each child. Additionally, young children experience sadness in different ways than older children, teenagers, or adults. Because they don't have the language or cognitive development to express sadness verbally, it often reveals itself in less obvious ways. For instance, children may complain about aches and pains, hide or isolate themselves, and express irritability, anger, or fatigue. This is why it may be hard for caring adults to see and recognize the symptoms of sadness.

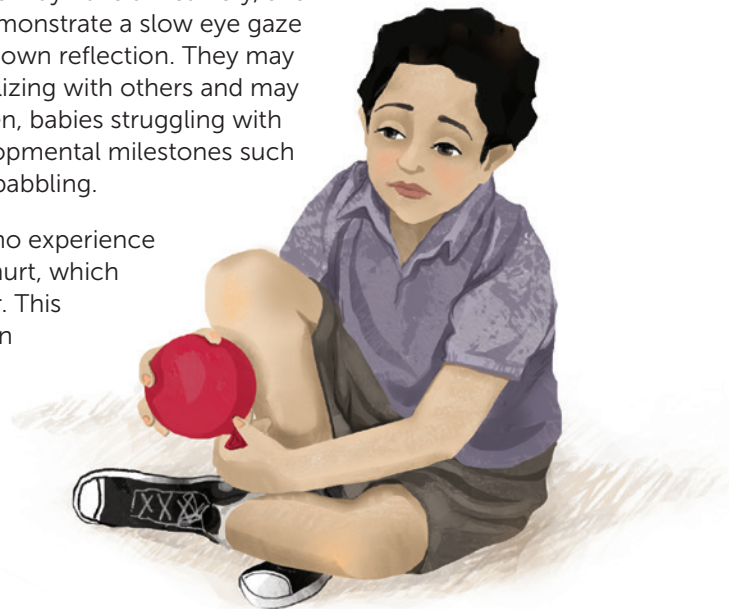
Sometimes, a sad feeling is more than simple sadness. It may become a daily occurrence and might linger for days, weeks, or even months. This persistent kind of sadness is not just a passing phase and could be a sign of pediatric depression. It's estimated that in the United States alone, 1 percent of infants, 4 percent of preschool-age children, and 5 percent of school-age children meet the criteria for major depression. Learning the unique behavioral and physical symptoms of sadness in children can help you prevent a clinical disorder from developing. By reading *Sometimes When I'm Sad* with a child or a group of children, you'll learn and teach about the textures of sadness as well as how to deal with the emotion when it occurs.

HOW TO SPOT SADNESS IN CHILDREN OF VARIOUS AGES

Sadness can look different in children of varying ages. And while every individual child experiences and demonstrates emotions in unique ways, certain patterns and common expressions do exist. These can help you become aware of sadness in children you care for, and in turn can help you support them in coping with their feelings.

Infants: Babies who experience sadness may have a weak cry, show poor appetite, appear lethargic, and demonstrate a slow eye gaze when looking at faces, objects, or their own reflection. They may also show disinterest in toys or in socializing with others and may occasionally be difficult to soothe. Often, babies struggling with sadness are delayed in achieving developmental milestones such as sitting up, reaching for objects, and babbling.

Toddlers: Two- and three-year-olds who experience sadness are highly sensitive and easily hurt, which can lead to tearfulness, crying, or anger. This hypersensitivity occurs because children this age don't have the language and cognitive skills to fully express their sad feelings. The sadness is experienced as an irritability on an emotional level, which can frequently be challenging and overwhelming for



children this age. Sadness can affect toddlers in physical ways too. Many children complain about aches and pains such as stomachaches, headaches, earaches, and the like when they are feeling sad.

Preschool-age children: With greater access to language than toddlers and infants, most preschool children can express themselves with words. However, their use of language does not always accurately or clearly reflect the sadness they feel. Be on the lookout for phrases like, "I'm so mad," "This is stupid," or "I hate this." Also watch for behaviors such as breaking things, clinging, sulking, or isolating themselves from others. These are more common ways preschoolers experience and express sadness. In children of all ages, sadness seeps into the body, so preschoolers feeling sadness will frequently be tired, whiny, or fussy. They may also complain about aches and pains.

School-age children: Children this age are generally more skilled in expressing their emotions than younger children. Some may be able to communicate sadness by using language like, "I'm feeling sad," "This makes me feel bad," or "I'm upset." But others might struggle in both detecting sadness and communicating it. School-age children may look glum or appear quiet, or they may display opposite behaviors like argumentativeness, irritability, and impatience. Other signs of sadness include a decreased level of energy, working slowly to finish schoolwork or other tasks (at school or at home), and poor concentration, as well as a lack of interest in games and toys, playing with friends, or doing other activities. Eating too much or too little can be a sign of sadness in these children, as can changes in sleeping patterns. Like other age ranges, school-age children experience aches and pains as a result of feeling sad.



WAYS TO REDUCE SADNESS IN CHILDREN

Once you've identified the unique ways children experience sadness, there are many approaches you can take to help them reduce their sad feelings. A good guideline is to use the five senses to revitalize a child's mind and body. Sadness is often an experience of depletion, in which emotions are flattened or weakened. Sadness also diminishes children physically, creating weariness and fatigue. By feeding the senses, we not only connect with children, we bring evidenced-based comfort into our approach.

Sight: The sun and natural light hold powerful benefits for reducing sadness. Invite natural light into your classroom, home, or workspace. Open any shades, curtains, or blinds. Allow children of all ages to play or rest in the outdoor light—or in a pool of sunlight indoors. Consider incorporating color into the environment. Bright, vivid, and deeply rich colors can improve moods. You might bring these hues into your space through pictures, bulletin board backgrounds, paint colors, decorations, age-appropriate objects (such as stuffed animals, toys, and mobiles), or even clothing. Rotate new colors in and old ones out so the environment doesn't get stale. Also invite children to play with color by using coloring books, paint sets, blocks, or clay.