

# Adjustment Disorders in Children - A Quick Guide

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## Quick Guide to Adjustment Disorders

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### What are adjustment disorders?

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Adjustment disorders are a mental health condition in which a child has an unusually strong or long-lasting reaction to an upsetting event. The event can be anything that's important to the child, such as a death in the family or moving to a new house or school. Children with an *adjustment disorder*

#### **adjustment disorder**

A disorder characterized by an unusually strong reaction to an upsetting event.

have a hard time coping with their feelings about the event and show signs of anxiety, depression or behavior problems. It can happen to kids and teenagers of any age and usually lasts less than six months.

### What are the symptoms of adjustment disorder?

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The symptoms of adjustment disorders can look very different in different children. The main thing is that a child with adjustment disorder will act or feel noticeably different from the way they did before the stressful event. Some common signs of an adjustment disorder include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Trouble sleeping
- Crying a lot
- Avoiding school, family and friends
- Fighting
- Anger

These reactions last longer than you would expect and get in the way of the child's daily life.

## How are adjustment disorders diagnosed?

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To be diagnosed with an adjustment disorder a child must have been through a stressful event that leaves them very upset and not able to cope. Their symptoms must be worse than would normally be expected from that kind of event and cause serious problems with school or home life. If the symptoms last longer than six months after the end of the stressful event, a different mental health condition would be diagnosed instead of adjustment disorder.

## How are adjustment disorders treated?

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Talk therapy is often very helpful for adjustment disorders. A therapist can help the child express their emotions and learn to control upsetting feeling when they get too big. *Cognitivebehavioral therapy*

### **behavioral therapy**

A form of treatment that focuses directly on reducing or managing problematic behaviors without particular attention to thoughts, events or circumstances that prompted the behaviors.

(CBT) can also help kids learn skills to help them when dealing with future upsetting situations. Therapy for adjustment disorders usually only lasts a few weeks or sometimes months.

If a child with an adjustment disorder is very anxious or depressed, a doctor may also prescribe a low dose of *antidepressant*

### **antidepressant**

A class of medications originally designed to treat depression and other mood disorders. There are many kinds of antidepressants, from the newer SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) and SNRIs (Selective Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors), as well as the older and less frequently prescribed tricyclics and MAOIs. Some antidepressants are also useful for treating anxiety disorders.

medication. In most cases, the child only takes the medication for a short time.

## What are the risk factors for developing other disorders?

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Teenagers with an untreated adjustment disorder are at more risk for developing depression, *chronic*

### **chronic**

A continuing or recurring condition that can be characterized by either persistent symptoms or the reappearance of symptoms after periods of otherwise normal function.

anxiety, and *substance abuse*

***substance abuse***

*Unhealthy use of substances including alcohol, marijuana and other drugs.*

problems.