

A Guide for Patients and Families

Adjustment Disorder in Child and Adolescent



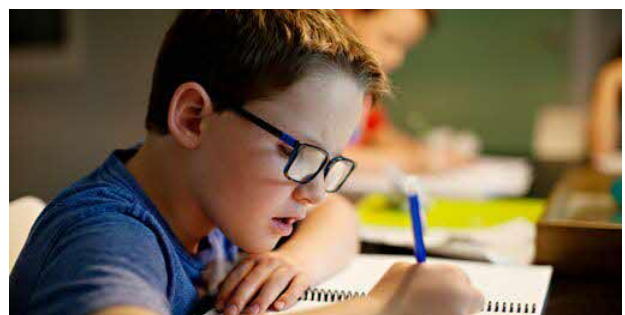
What is Adjustment Disorder?

The main cause of an Adjustment Disorder is a recent stressful life event where individual stress responses vary significantly.

An event that one person finds overwhelming may seem trivial to another. A child's or an adolescent's temperament, coping skills, past experiences, current developmental stage and social support systems all contribute to his or her ability to respond to stress. Sources of stress also differ in duration, intensity and magnitude.

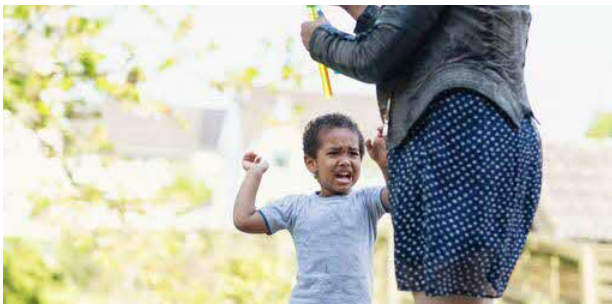
Common sources of stress for children or adolescents include:

- The breakup of a friendship or a romantic relationship.
- Early onset of puberty.
- Getting into an accident.
- Being diagnosed with a medical illness.
- Parental separation or divorce, loss of a family member or family conflict.
- Moving to a new home, community or country.
- Stressful school experiences such as being bullied, facing major examinations.



Signs & symptoms:

Children and adolescents struggling with adjustment disorder may exhibit signs of emotional or behavioural, or a combination of both such as:



- Feelings of sadness, worry, hopelessness, nervousness, fear, irritability or anger.
- Difficulty expressing their emotions verbally and may act out through behavioral changes.
- Unexplained body aches and pains, poor sleep or appetite.
- Clinginess to major attachment figures (fear of separation).
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Problems at school or with schoolwork.
- Changes in academic performance.
- Truancy, fighting or other acting out or reckless behaviours.
- Self-harming behaviours.
- Thoughts of; or attempts at suicide.

It is crucial for parents, caregiver and educators to be attentive to these signs, provide support and consider involving a mental health professional to help the young individual navigate and cope with the challenges they are facing.

Treatment

Specific treatment by a clinician may not always be required. With support from family and friends or from a counsellor, symptoms may go away in a few months. If symptoms are particularly distressing and debilitating, one or a combination of the following treatments may be helpful.

Psychological Interventions

These therapies can help your child better understand what an Adjustment Disorder is and learn ways to manage the symptoms. One commonly used type of psychotherapy involves helping your child identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts and beliefs that contribute to how he is feeling. Your child will also learn skills for coping, problem solving and anger or stress management.



Family Interventions

It may also be helpful for parents or other family members to receive therapy to address parental or family issues that may affect the child's ability to cope with his or her circumstances.



You can also help your child by being patient, understanding and supportive. Be encouraging and empathise with his or her challenges. Celebrate all small successes and be positive. If the source of stress is school-related, you can talk to your child's teachers or school counsellors for help.



Typically, doctors do not prescribe medication to treat children or adolescents with an Adjustment Disorder. However, in some instances, certain medications may be prescribed in the short term. Talk to your child's doctor if you have any queries or concerns about medication.

If your child has not yet seen a doctor and you suspect that he is showing signs of an Adjustment Disorder, you may raise your concerns with your child's school counsellors.

School counsellors are connected to our community mental health service, REACH (Response, Early intervention, Assessment in Community mental Health), which can provide further advice and assistance.

If your child is seeking help at our clinic, please raise your concerns with your child's doctor, nurse, or allied health professionals.