

# Black Children and Mental Illness. What To Do?

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## Contributed Post

As children grow and experience new things, it can often take a toll on their well-being. It can lead them to feel misunderstood, lonely, and anxious. Children have to face a multitude of problems (bullying, the pressure to acquire good grades, broken relationships, bad parents) at a very young age which many times contribute to their mental and physical health. Add in discrimination and racism that many Black children experience and the problem becomes exacerbated, which could lead a child to feel even more depressed.

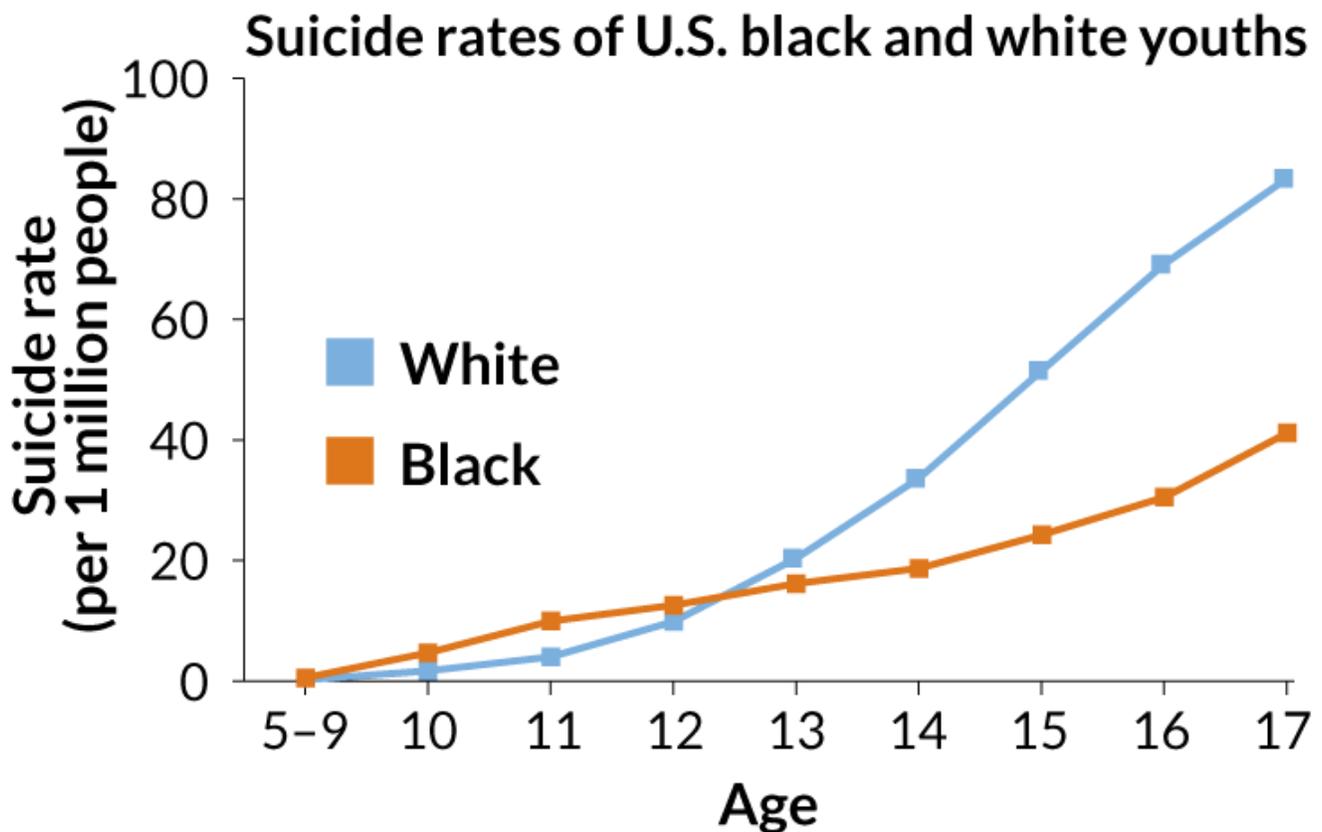


Mental illness isn't something traditionally spoken about in most Black households but Black children are susceptible to it. It's not just a "white thing." The reason: racial discrimination and inequality found in our schools, neighbors, and corporate organizations, leads Black children to feel marginalized and isolated. Things are changing. Black youth today are more likely to talk about their psychological problems than ever before.

**“They worried that if they let out their feelings, it may lead to telling truths that adults may not want to hear.”**

Previous research suggested that a higher socioeconomic status caused less mental health illnesses; however, recent studies show a relation between socioeconomic status and depression. These studies conclude that a high socioeconomic status leads to higher depression rates in Black youth. In a study, researchers tried to find the effect of gender, place, and socioeconomic status on depression. The study found that high socioeconomic status is linked with depression, anxiety, and also higher rates of suicide in Black males.

Black youth who live in predominantly white areas are prone to depression. The reason is that Black youth face racial discrimination in these areas. Similarly, high income is linked to more depression in a predominantly white area. This is how socioeconomic status causes increased levels of depression. The study further elaborates the point that the reason why Black Americans chose to live in a predominantly Black area is that it saves their families from discrimination.



Source: J.A. Bridge et al/JAMA Pediatrics 2018

A recent study reported the rates of suicide among Black and white children. Overall suicide rates among Black youth are lower than white children. Black children, between the ages of five and 13, suffer from higher rates of depression and suicide, however, for ages 13-18, the suicide rates are almost 50% less than those of white adolescents.

According to Psychology Today, 3.2% of Black youth reported suicidal thoughts while 1.4% of Black youth attempted suicide. It is alarming to find that suicide is the third leading cause of death among Black children.

Mental health illnesses are becoming prevalent. Although racism is a major factor, other reasons may cause your child to feel depressed. No parent wants to see their child battle a mental health illness. Parents often feel helpless, but it is important that they provide the support, care, love, and affection that their child needs in times of distress.

To battle depression, parents should be the first respondents. But how do you even know that your child is depressed? If your child appears withdrawn—no longer enjoying the activities that they used to—it is a clear indication of depression. Your child may show symptoms such as unusually quiet behavior, poor eating and sleeping habits, and body aches. If you are having a difficult time discovering what your child is going through, you could resort to a cell phone monitoring application, like Xnspy to get some help.

Every kid is different and requires attention on your part, to realize what it is that they need. A group of researchers conducted a study regarding depression in Black youth and what helps them during this time of distress. They interviewed each child and held group discussions regarding depression and their coping mechanisms.

There were two popular opinions from the children. One group wanted to be left alone and didn't want their parents or guardian to ask about their feelings. They worried that if they let out their feelings, it may lead to telling truths that adults may not want to hear. This stems from the notion that parents do not approve of certain behavior and that a child may get into trouble for disclosing it. This is where parents should try to be supportive rather than reprimand their child for misbehavior.

However, the second group wanted their parents to listen to them and understand the situation from their perspective, rather than giving, as one girl said, "outdated advice."

Considering that, parents should listen and determine what their child wants from them. No matter what, it is always a good idea to encourage your child to engage in some activity that you know they enjoy. Furthermore, you need to be there for your child at all times. You should focus on developing trust between you and your child. This is only possible when you give them attention, talk to them, and help them out in difficult times. This encourages your child to open up to you.





*Suicide is the third leading cause of death among Black children.*

However, if you think that your child's depression is not going away, you should seek professional healthcare. A therapist can provide guidance and counseling for your child. In this, your focus should be on making your child feel comfortable.

Issues such as racial discrimination that cause depression among Black children cannot be solved by parents or a healthcare provider alone. More effort is required from organizations, including schools and community. There needs to be an understanding of how racism and discrimination happen at four different levels: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. At the community level, spreading awareness and bringing people together can help start the process of solving this problem.

By David Bennett

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