

MENTAL HEALTH MEMO: MANAGING THE “WINTER BLUES” IN OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN

For some children (and more often for adults), the winter months are associated with changes in mood and behaviour that is referred to as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a subtype of depression, often linked to the disruption of our “circadian rhythm” due to the decrease in sunlight which affects the sleep-wake cycle.

Parents/guardians should be alert to the signs that may indicate their child/youth are experiencing SAD: changes in mood (sadness, irritability, feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness); lack of enjoyment in activities that are normally enjoyable; low energy (unusual tiredness, fatigue); changes in sleep (sleeping much more than usual); changes in eating (craving simple carbohydrates, overeating); difficulty concentrating (trouble completing school assignments on time, decreased grades) and less time socializing (less time with friends and/or in extra-curricular activities).

Here are a few things you can do to help your child/youth manage the winter blues:

- Establish a sleep routine (regular bedtime/waketime every day)
- Help your child eat right (avoid loading up on simple carbohydrates and sugar and provide plenty of fruits and vegetables)
- Encourage your child/youth to get plenty of outdoor exercise when the sun is out
- Schedule fun indoor activities (watching a movie, bowling, playing board games) when it is too cold to be outside

The problems caused by SAD, such as lower grades and less socializing with friends can affect self-esteem and leave our kids feeling disappointed, isolated and lonely. If you have concerns with your or your child’s/youth’s mood at any time, please refer to the directory “Mental Health Resources for Children, Youth, and Families” on the RRDSB website for information on where to get help.

For more information, please contact the RRDSB Mental Health Leader: tracey.idle@rrdsb.com