



## Chasing Away the Winter Blues

Parents of young children are often frustrated each fall and spring when we switch from Daylight Savings Time back to Standard Time or vice versa. All of a sudden, children have a hard time waking up on time or aren't ready to go to bed when we and the clocks say it's time. In the fall, the disruption in schedule is complicated by the days getting shorter and darker. For some people, including children, winter with short days and less sunlight causes what we often call the winter blues or seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

### Symptoms of the winter blues

- Fatigue, loss of energy, and irritability
- Sleep problems
- Loss of interest in activities
- Crying spells and temper tantrums
- General sadness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased appetite, especially craving for carbohydrates



During winter, the body makes more melatonin, the hormone that encourages sleep, and less serotonin, the hormone that fights depression. Most people are able to adjust to these changes, but some have difficulty. It's important to pay attention to whether winter blues symptoms in young children tend to increase during fall and winter and decrease in spring and summer, to help distinguish the problems from a general depression that needs more focused treatment.

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### Tips for coping with time changes and improving mood during winter

- When time changes occur, try to stick with normal bed and nap time routines while making gradual adjustments over several nights.
- Allow as much natural sunlight into your home or classroom as possible (e.g., open curtains and shades).
- Keep the lights on (special light therapy is often recommended for individuals with SAD).
- Encourage lots of physical exercise, including outdoor play and activities.
- Provide lots of opportunity for active play and exercise.
- Highlight the good things about winter; talk about how winter helps the earth prepare for spring.
- Serve healthy foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

## R E S O U R C E S

*Seasonal Affective Disorder.* KidsHealth. <http://bit.ly/2OrCkW8>

*Winter Blues - Seasonal Affective Disorder and Depression.* Healthy Children. <http://bit.ly/35jsJH9>

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at [PAIECMH@pakeys.org](mailto:PAIECMH@pakeys.org) with questions or concerns.

