

Depression in young people

Information for individuals, partners and families

NCMH
National Centre for Mental Health

Depression in young people



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It is normal to feel down and not enjoy things sometimes, but when these feelings are severe, long lasting, or keep coming back and begin to affect your day-to-day life, this may be a sign of depression.

Depression is very much a real illness, and can affect your moods, energy, thoughts and behaviour. Depression can be treated.

It can affect people of any age, and is common in teenagers and young adults.

Each year as many as 1 in 20 young people suffer with depression. Both boys and girls can be affected, although girls are twice as likely to experience it as boys.

Many things have been linked to depression. It can run in families, although many children whose parents have had depression do not go on to have problems themselves.

It can also occur after a very traumatic event, such as the death of someone close to you, or in response to life stresses like bullying or problems with family or friends. Sometimes depression can occur for no obvious reason.

Young people with depression each experience the illness in their own way, but there are some common symptoms:

- Feeling unhappy or miserable most of the time.
- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed.
- Being less able to concentrate and make decisions.
- Loss of confidence or self-esteem.
- Being too hard on yourself or feeling very guilty.

- Feeling low on energy and easily tired.
- Trouble sleeping, or sleeping more than usual.
- Feeling agitated/on edge or feeling slowed down.
- Changes to your appetite and weight.
- Thinking about death or any suicidal thoughts or behaviour.

Children with depression may also feel very irritable and short-tempered instead of, or as well as feeling sad. Persistent feelings of hopelessness and that life is not worth living can be a warning sign of severe depression.

Sometimes with depression you can have other problems such as stomach aches or headaches, feeling anxious, difficulties controlling your behaviour, or you could develop problems with drugs, alcohol and food.

Occasionally young people with depression will not show obvious signs of the condition, but have problems focusing on school or college work, their social life, or their relationships with family and friends.

Getting help

If you are suffering with depression it can be difficult to talk about how you feel, but it is important to try and get help as soon as possible. Getting help is important whatever your age, and can have a positive impact on both yourself and those who care about you.

The first step is to contact your GP or go to see a school counsellor or nurse, who will be able to provide support and treatment locally. Many voluntary groups like Mind (mind.org.uk) also offer valuable advice.

There are many different treatments available including psychological therapies and medication. Learning more about depression and treatments (known as psychoeducation) can also be helpful.

The treatments you receive will vary depending on the exact type of illness you have and how severe it is, and also on which types of treatments you and your family prefer.

Psychoeducation and psychological or 'talking' therapies will often be the first treatments recommended.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave. It teaches you ways to cope better with negative thoughts and feelings, and actions you can take to break the cycle of feeling down.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) concentrates on improving your relationships with other people in your life. This aims to help resolve some of the stresses that can trigger depression. Family Therapy is another type of treatment that works in a similar way.

Counselling, where the person with depression discusses their problems and feelings, can also help.

Creative therapies including art and music are suitable for some people, and there are even some specially designed online games that can help.

For some young people, especially those dealing with more severe forms of depression, medication also plays an important part. Not all medicines which work well for adults with depression are suitable for young people, but some have been shown to be effective.

Tips for young people with depression

- If you've had depression in the past, or have a close family member who has had depression, it's especially important to get help early. Keep an eye on your mood and watch for the symptoms mentioned earlier.
- Talk to people you trust about your problems - friends, parents, even teachers or lecturers may be able to help. It can be difficult, but try to be honest about how you feel. Keeping it bottled up can make it worse, and it is important not to feel alone with these problems.
- Try to live a healthy lifestyle – exercising regularly, eating properly and getting a good night's sleep can make you feel better about yourself, and help with depression.
- Try to find activities that help you relax and make time for them.
- Finding ways to deal with stress, for example, using breathing exercise, can help with your moods.
- Spend time with friends and family doing things you enjoy. You might not feel like it sometimes, but it can help.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs - it may seem like they help in the short term, but they will only make things much worse.



Tips for parents and families

- If you're worried that your child may be depressed, talk to them. Be sure not to trivialise their problems, and remember that issues that seem small to you might be very important to them.
- Encourage them to talk to others - for example school counsellors, their GP or even close friends that they trust. Let them know that it's ok to talk about feeling low and that help is available.
- If you have suffered with depression yourself in the past, be aware that your child may be more prone to the illness. Watch out for the warning signs, but at the same time remember that a history of depression in the family does not mean they will definitely have problems.
- Try to support your child in having a healthy lifestyle and feeling good about themselves - encourage them to exercise and help them to eat healthily and get enough sleep.
- Spend time with your child doing things you both enjoy. This can help to lift their mood.
- Don't assume that every small mood change or disagreement is related to depression – some of the symptoms are very similar to the normal behaviour of teenagers, and may just be a normal part of growing up.



Useful websites

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Information on depression in young people including downloadable leaflets, details on treatment and real people's experiences of depression.

rcpsych.ac.uk - search 'depression in young people' from homepage

Depression in Teenagers

This site presents key facts about depression for young people in an interactive format including quizzes and exercises and audio clips.

depressioninteenagers.co.uk

Depression Alliance

Help on living with depression, recovery and wellbeing, useful contacts and support for family and friends.

depressionalliance.org

YoungMinds

This organisation provides information and advice, a guide to mental health services for young people, and information for parents of young people with mental health problems.

youngminds.org.uk

Hopeline UK

This organisation offers telephone support for depression particularly for children and young adults especially for those with suicidal thoughts.

papyrus-uk.org/more/hopelineuk

StudentMinds

University based student mental health charity with a focus on peer support. Student Minds facilitators work in many UK Universities.

studentminds.org.uk

Help with our depression research

We are working to better understand mental health problems including depression. The aim of our research is to improve diagnosis, treatment and support for the future.

But to do this we need **your** help.

Helping with our research is easy - it involves completing an online survey which should take around 10-15 minutes to complete. It asks questions about your:

- personal information, like date of birth and ethnicity
- mental and physical health
- lifestyle

To take part, visit www.ncmh.info/help or if you are under 18 contact us:

 info@ncmh.info

 **029 2068 8401**

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