



Low mood and depression

About depression

Coping with different emotions is part of everyone's life. We all feel happy and sad at different times. Feeling sad can be a natural and normal response to what is happening in our lives. Mostly, the passing of time, life changes and the support of those around us help these feelings go away. Depression is when sadness and low feelings do not go away, overwhelm a person and stop them from doing the things they normally do.

Things that can cause children and young people to become depressed include: family conflicts; divorce or separation; the death of someone close to them; feeling rejected or left out; problems with school work or exam pressure; changing school or moving home; friendship problems; issues relating to sexual identity or gender; physical illness in themselves or a carer; low self-esteem; bullying; abuse; poverty and homelessness; a family history of depression.

The symptoms of depression

Depression in young people is not always the easiest problem to spot or get them to talk about. Some children can talk about feeling unhappy, but others are only able to show how they feel through the way they behave. Signs of depression may include:

- Finding it hard to concentrate, losing interest in schoolwork and play
- Refusing to go to school or playing truant
- Disruptive behaviour at school, bullying, stealing or doing other things that lead to them being punished
- Constantly complaining of feeling bored or lonely, even when they have friends
- Irritability and moodiness beyond what is normal for your child
- Tearfulness
- Defiance or violent outbursts
- Lack of confidence and blaming themselves if things go wrong
- Becoming very withdrawn
- Self-injury, drinking or taking drugs to excess
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Sleeping very little or too much
- Regressive behaviour such as bedwetting

Younger children and depression

If your child has been displaying some of these signs for a while, talk to them about their troubles, however small they may seem to you. After that, seek help as early as you can. Your GP is the best starting point, and talk to others who know your child well – family, friends, school – to see if they have also noticed changes and signs.

Teenagers and depression

Teenagers are often moody and uncommunicative, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are depressed. Their behaviour can just be part of typical adolescence, related to hormonal changes, brain development and trying to find their place in the world.

Some teenagers, however, feel overwhelmed by the changes they are going through and feel it is all too much to cope with. They may withdraw completely, or seek relief by harming themselves or taking risks. Teenagers often refuse to talk at home about difficult issues and this can be really worrying for parents.

Depression can be linked to other problems such as anxiety, eating disorders or learning disabilities.

Suicide warning signs

Young people who are severely clinically depressed can think about, speak of, or attempt suicide. Suicidal thoughts and tendencies should always be taken seriously.

Some young people are more at risk of suicide than others, including those who:

- Have an underlying mental health disorder
- Are being bullied
- Have a family history of suicide or have experienced the suicide of a friend or relative
- Are adopted
- Are having relationship problems
- Who are uncertain about gender or sexual orientation
- Have experience of abuse, disadvantage, discrimination, alcohol and drug use

Other signs to take seriously:

- An obsession with suicide, death or dying
- Saying things like - "I don't want to wake up tomorrow" "Everyone would be better off without me"
- Doing internet searches about ways to commit suicide
- Giving away their stuff, often possessions they value
- Seeming to say goodbye in messages to friends and/or family

Treatment

The following guidance about the treatment of depression is from the Royal College of Psychiatrists:



Depression is a treatable illness. The goal of treatment is to improve the symptoms, prevent the illness from returning and help the young person lead a normal life. Depending on how depression is affecting your child, and how severe it is, they may need different treatments. When they have serious symptoms, or express suicidal thoughts or display other risky behaviours, they may need medication and sometimes admission to hospital.

Anti-depressant medication

Anti-depressants are often prescribed for young people by a specialist doctor (often a psychiatrist) and sometimes the GP. It is recognised that they have a role to play in managing depression but are not the whole solution.

Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) says antidepressants should be given only to teenagers and children with moderate or severe depression, when psychotherapy has failed. Medication should be taken in addition to psychological support such as counselling.

Fluoxetine, which is sold under the trade name Prozac, is the only drug recommended for younger people. Other medication can be used as second-line treatment if fluoxetine does not work.

It is important to know that the risk of suicide is highest during the first two months of antidepressant treatment. Teenagers on antidepressants should be closely monitored for any sign that the depression is getting worse.

GP confidentiality and age of child

Over 16s have a legal right to go to a doctor on their own and for conversations to be kept confidential.

Under 16s can consent to their own treatment if they're believed to have enough intelligence, competence and understanding to fully appreciate what's involved in their treatment.

Coming out of depression

Young people do tend to get better over time with the right support although it can be a slow process. The change from being in a depressed state to moving out of it is often described as a black cloud lifting, a feeling of returning to 'normal' and being able to look forward to things.

What can help? What to do next

These are some things that can make a difference:

1. Trust your gut feeling – you know when something's just not right.
2. Don't ignore worrying symptoms. Talk to your child about the changes in them you've noticed and voice your concerns in a caring and non-judgmental way. Think about what might be troubling them and how they might be feeling.
3. Avoid asking too many questions, trying to give solutions, dismissing them or glossing over their pain and sadness. Just listen and empathise.
4. Try again another day if they don't want to talk about it. Expressing feelings is hard and when you are depressed it's even more difficult.
5. There are people to speak to, such as a school counsellor, trusted teacher and GP, there are also helplines, webchat, emails, text and forums (see Resources list at the back).
6. Keep your child's connections and communications going so they feel less isolated. Open up opportunities for them to see friends and family; make time to chat regularly; take part in sports, activities, silly and fun things; make music; walk a dog; try to keep them involved and interested.
7. Physical activity, good nutrition and regular sleep can really help.
8. If nothing is helping and the symptoms are worsening, go to your GP.
9. Involve your child in treatment choices. Weigh up all the available options for your situation - talking therapies, medication, inpatient units.
10. If your child doesn't 'connect' with a therapist, for example, find another one. Get a feel for different approaches and types of people.
11. If your child has been prescribed anti-depression medication, ask for a clear explanation of both benefits and side effects. It is common, for example, to feel even worse in the first few weeks of anti-depressant treatment, before beginning to feel better.
12. If your child needs to take medicines at school or college, help them to manage this, this might be putting reminders on their phone or helping them keep on top of prescriptions.
13. Be open with younger sisters and brothers. They'll know 'something' is wrong and also need your time and attention. Ask how they feel and listen to them too.
14. Look after yourself. Find support for you, be honest about your own feelings. Don't blame yourself.
15. Be hopeful.

<p>YoungMinds #Take20 www.youngminds.org.uk/take20 Ideas and suggestions to help parents find 20 minutes to do something together with their child to support confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Top Tips www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/top-tips-for-you-and-your-child Supporting a child through a time of difficulty or change. Information about medications www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/medications</p>	<p>Papyrus (Prevention of Young Suicide) www.papyrus-uk.org Confidential advice and support for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and for anyone concerned about a young person who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts. Open 9am-10pm Monday-Friday and 2-10pm at weekends and on bank holidays. HOPELineUK: 0800 068 41 41 Text: 07786 209 697 Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org</p>
<p>Childline www.childline.org.uk If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small. 24/7 helpline: 0800 1111 Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat To email: sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at www.childline.org.uk/registration</p>	<p>The Mix www.themix.org.uk If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service. Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994 Email: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us Webchat open daily 4-11pm: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team Counselling service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service</p>
<p>CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) www.thecalmzone.net Provides support to anyone who is feeling down and needs to talk or find information. Open daily 5pm-midnight. National helpline: 0800 58 58 58 London helpline: 0808 802 58 58 Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat</p>	<p>Samaritans www.samaritans.org Emotional support for anyone who needs to talk, day or night. 24/7 Helpline (UK and Republic of Ireland): 116 123 Email: jo@samaritans.org Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org</p>
<p>YoungMinds Crisis Messenger Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis. Text YM to 85258 Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.</p>	<p>Student Minds www.studentminds.org.uk Supports students, and parents of students, to look after their mental health. The website provides information about services offered by universities, and young people can also access their peer and group support programmes. Email: info@studentminds.org.uk Phone: 0113 343 8440</p>

<p>Mee Two app www.meetwo.co.uk A free app for teenagers providing peer support and resources. Young people can share what's going on for them and send supportive messages to others. All messages are fully moderated.</p> <p>Download from Google Play or App Store.</p>	<p>Youth Wellbeing Directory www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing Lists local services for young people's mental health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Youth Access www.youthaccess.org.uk Offers information about advice and counselling services in the UK for young people aged 12-25 years.</p>	<p>Finding a private counsellor or therapist If this is an affordable option for you, you can find accredited private child and adolescent therapists and counsellors living locally to you by searching the following directories.</p> <p>Counselling directory: www.counselling-directory.org.uk</p> <p>BACP: www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists</p> <p>UKCP: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist</p>
<p>MindEd www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk MindEd for families is a website where you can hear about other parents' experiences and find clear, helpful guidance on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.</p>	