
Depression in young people

Summary

- Young people can feel sad and worried about life events such as exams, fights with family or friends, changing schools or moving house.
 - If the feelings of sadness go on for weeks or months and affect everyday life, the young person may have depression.
 - Symptoms of depression in young people include feeling grumpy, having trouble sleeping, feeling worthless or guilty, eating more or less than usual and gaining or losing weight.
 - Life situations can contribute to depression in young people but sometimes there seems to be no reason.
 - Encourage young people to talk about how they feel with someone they know and trust such as a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend.
 - An important next step is for the young person to visit a doctor to learn about depression and how it is treated.
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Feeling sad or moody sometimes is a part of life. Young people can feel sad and worried about life events such as exams, fights with family or friends, changing schools or moving house.

Sometimes, the feelings of sadness go on for weeks or months and affect everyday life. If a young person feels miserable most of the time and finds it difficult to get motivated, they may have **depression** – a serious illness that can affect people of all ages.

Suicide is a common cause of death in young people, so depression should be taken seriously.

Symptoms of depression in young people

Like everyone, young people can have occasional mood swings, feel irritable sometimes and be particularly sensitive to rejection and criticism. But if these moods have lasted for two weeks or more, the young person could have depression.

Symptoms that may indicate depression include:

- feeling irritable or grumpy
- feeling tired
- feeling worthless or guilty most of the time
- having thoughts of death or suicide
- having trouble sleeping – either falling asleep or staying asleep
- lacking motivation and feeling everything is too hard
- losing interest in food or eating too much
- losing weight or gaining weight
- using cigarettes, alcohol or illegal drugs.

Sometimes there are no obvious symptoms of depression, but parents may notice behavioural changes in young people that suggest depression and should not be ignored. These include:

- social withdrawal
- lower marks at school
- risk-taking behaviour
- use of alcohol and drugs.

Suicide or self-harm

Depression is one of the major risk factors for **suicide** and **self-harm**. If a young person is self-harming or talking about suicide, it is important that they talk with close and trusted people in their lives, such as family or friends.

Help them to be safe and remove dangerous items, such as medication, guns or other dangerous items, and encourage them to see a healthcare professional. In case of an emergency, call triple zero (000) and ask for help.

Causes of depression in young people

Depression is a mental illness, and it is one of the most common health problems for young people in Australia. Many different factors and life circumstances can contribute to anxiety and depression in young people. These can include:

- fights with family or friends
- changing schools or starting secondary school
- **being bullied**
- experiencing a relationship break-up, recent death, abuse or neglect.

Sometimes depression is caused by genetic factors, or biological factors like chemical imbalances.

In all cases, it is important that depression is diagnosed and treated early.

Treatment for depression in young people

Encourage young people to talk about how they feel with someone they know and trust, such as a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend.

An important next step is for the young person to visit their doctor to learn whether they have depression and what can be done to treat it. Support for people with depression can include psychological therapy that focuses on building skills to deal with life stresses and to change negative thinking patterns.

Your doctor may also add antidepressant medication to the treatment plan. It can take up to six weeks to feel better after treatment with medication begins, but most young people will notice an improvement. Encourage them to speak with their doctor about any changes in their moods.

Self-help tips for improving mental health include:

- exercising regularly
- eating healthy food
- practising relaxation techniques
- doing something enjoyable.

Many people find it hard to ask for professional help and sometimes young people do not want to go to a healthcare professional. If this is the case, you could let them know that depression is common and that you are concerned.

Try giving them some information about depression and also point out some of the comprehensive websites (such as **youthbeyondblue**, **Kids Helpline**, **ReachOut** and **headspace**), as well as the online and telephone counselling services available for young people.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Local community health centre
- **beyondblue** Support Service Tel. **1300 22 4636**
- **youthbeyondblue** Support Service Tel. **1300 22 4636**

- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**

- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **SuicideLine** Tel. **1300 651 251**
- **headspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **SANE Australia** Helpline Tel. **1800 187 263**

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