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## It's okay to feel sad

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### Summary

- Sadness is part of the ups and downs of life.
  - Feeling sad can prompt you to make choices that improve your life.
  - Sadness is not depression.
  - You can learn to manage your sadness.
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Everyone feels sad sometimes, just like everyone can feel joyful, angry, proud and plenty of other emotions. In other words, everyone has feelings, and those feelings are always changing.

Sometimes we feel happy (such as when we're having fun) and sometimes we feel sad (such as when we lose a loved one). Whatever the feeling, it is real and part of living.

A **negative emotion** may even help you. Our world focuses on happiness and treats unhappiness as an unnecessary or useless feeling. But sadness can slow you down, and make you really think about your life, your feelings and the people around you. It can help you keep sight of your relationships and dreams.

In other words, being sad doesn't mean you are not coping with a situation. Rather, it helps you come to terms with that situation and move on. It is an important emotion that can help you adapt, accept, focus, persevere and grow.

And there's more good news: you can learn to manage your sadness.

### About sadness

We use different words to talk about sadness: agony, anguish, broken heart, hurt, sorrow, dejection, dismay, homesickness, distress, unhappiness and more. All these emotions are a response to a negative situation.

Sadness is also often a result of another feeling, such as anger, stress, guilt, grief, anxiety or hopelessness. Sometimes, the other feeling may be so strong that you don't realise you are sad.

So what does sadness feel like? It may change how you feel physically. Perhaps you have a stomach ache or a headache, or you can't sleep.

Sadness may also change how you feel emotionally. Perhaps you are teary, grumpy, bored or frustrated, or just keen to avoid other people.

But recognising your sadness, and understanding that it is okay to feel sad, is a sign of a **stable sense of wellbeing**.

### You may feel sad for many reasons

Life is full of situations that may make people feel sad:

- having trouble at home (for example, family fights or domestic violence)
  - having trouble at school or work, or feeling pressure there
  - moving home
  - losing a loved one or a friend
  - being ill, or caring for someone who is ill
  - experiencing chemical changes in your body (from puberty, drugs or medicines)
  - experiencing changes in your thoughts (for example, developing an unhelpful thinking style such as being self-critical, or learning new information about subjects such as poverty or terrorism).
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When you face these situations, you may have unhelpful or negative thoughts about your sadness. And those thoughts can make you feel worse.

So, try a different approach: try to acknowledge your sadness and the situation that prompted it. And give yourself time to deal with any problems and feel better. You also may want to call on resources that could help you (such as friends and family, or a psychologist, or other health professional).

### **Sadness will ease**

Feeling better can involve taking one step or many. It may happen quickly or over a long time. Just remember that emotions ebb and flow, and you can move through sadness to a more positive emotion.

First, acknowledge that you are feeling sad. Then, look at ways to deal with your sadness. You may want to try some of these tips:

- Be honest with yourself and the people around you. Talk to someone whom you trust.
- Seek help from a professional (a doctor, psychologist, or other health professional). You may need support, advice or a referral to a specialist.
- Think about whether your sleep and eating patterns are good for you.
- Help someone else. Just improving someone else's life, or being part of a community, can lift your spirits.
- Find a creative way to express your sadness. Writing your thoughts in a diary, for example, may help you find a new perspective.
- Keep yourself safe. If you feel **at risk of hurting yourself**, let someone know immediately.
- If a prescribed medication makes you feel down, let your doctor know. And talk to your doctor before taking any non-prescribed medications or complementary or alternative medicines.
- Do things that you enjoy and that are good for you. Find ways to make your life more pleasurable: listen to music, go for a walk, read a book, call a friend.
- Tackle one problem at a time. It doesn't matter if you start with the biggest or smallest problem, just make a list and begin.
- Have confidence that things will improve. You need to trust that your sad feelings will lessen with time and effort.

### **Supporting someone else who is feeling sad**

Maybe you know someone else who is feeling sad. Being supportive isn't always easy, because it's hard to know why someone is sad and how they are coping.

Here are four basic tips:

1. Ask the person if they are okay. Just checking shows you care.
2. Listen without judging.
3. If the person is reluctant to ask someone for help (such as a school counsellor, a workplace HR representative or a doctor), you may be able to help by offering to go with them, finding the contact information for them to make the call, or even by finding them some **helpful information from a trusted and credible source**.
4. Reassure them that sadness is a valid emotion, and can be overcome.

For more ideas about how to support someone who is sad, **[read the tips from beyondblue](#)**.

### **Sadness is different from depression**

Feeling sad does not mean you have **depression**. But if your mood starts to interrupt your life and how you function, then you may have become depressed.

Key differences between sadness and clinical depression relate to the cause for the change in mood and how long you have felt that way.

If your mood relates to a recent event, such as a relationship breakup, then you may well be feeling sadness. But if that breakup was months ago, or you can see no clear reason for your change in mood, you could be

depressed, and it might be helpful for you to chat to your GP about what's causing you to feel the way you do. Let's look the differences between sadness and depression.

**Sadness:**

- is part of life's regular ups and downs, but it is not constant
- is a common reaction to an upset or setback, and is usually not a cause for worry
- is interrupted by times of laughter and contentment
- is an emotion that can involve negative thoughts but does not usually involve suicidal thoughts.

**Depression:**

- is a longer term feeling (more than two weeks) of severe sadness and other symptoms. These symptoms may include sleeplessness, low energy, concentration problems, pessimism, loss of hope, suicidal thoughts and appetite issues.
- has complicated causes, which may involve genetic or biological components. Maybe the person has experienced a trauma or psychological stress can lead to significant weight change or sleep disruption.
- is mentally painful and can be life altering.
- beyondblue has **a checklist for working out whether you have depression.**

**Remember...**

- Everyone feels sad sometimes.
- You can learn to manage your sadness.
- Feeling sad does not mean you are experiencing **depression**
- If you have been feeling persistently sad for more than two weeks or you have lost interest in most of your usual activities, you might be depressed. In this case, it is important to seek help.

**Where to get help**

- Your **GP (Doctor)**
- **SANE Australia** Tel. **1800 18 SANE (7263)**
- Need Help? Chat live with a **SANE Helpline Advisor** (Available Monday-Friday, 10am-10pm AEST).
- **SANE Forums** are full of people who want to talk to you and offer support.
- **headspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Kids Help Line** Tel. **1800 551 800**
- **beyondblue** Tel. **1300 22 4636**
- **SuicideLine** Tel. **1300 651 251**
- **Australian Psychological Society** – Find a psychologist service Tel. **1800 333 497** (outside Melbourne) or **(03) 8662 3300** (in Melbourne)
- **mind** Tel. **1300 AT MIND (286 463)**

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