

## Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that shows up most often during the teenage years. It is a fairly common misconception that depression is an adult condition, but evidence shows that it's also quite common in children and teenagers. Even though it is common for people to say "I feel depressed", often what is being referred to is just sadness. Depression is not the sadness caused by life events such as bereavement or relationship problems, however severe this might be. Depression is a diagnosable disorder where a person's mood is 'down' over a long period of time (more than two weeks at a time) – even when the circumstances do not seem to justify it – and this affects their everyday life.

Even though the experience of depression is partly independent of changing day-to-day circumstances, negative events in a person's life can also trigger it. For teenagers, these events can include loss of a loved one, exam pressures, bullying, sex and sexuality, physical illness and parental divorce. Depression tends to run in families, so there is almost certainly a genetic component too. Depression can be mistaken for typical teenage 'moodiness', and vice versa, so if you or someone you know have been experiencing extended periods of sadness, it is important to speak to an adult and arrange a medical visit so that a conclusive diagnosis from a medical professional can be obtained. This will help them decide whether further intervention is necessary.

### Common signs of depression in young people

While a GP or psychiatrist will use tools such as questionnaires covering the severity and duration of a range of symptoms to reach a diagnosis of depression, there are a number of signs that may give a general indication that a young person is depressed. This includes:

- › Extreme moodiness and irritability
- › Giving up interests and not finding new ones
- › Losing interest in school and having trouble concentrating
- › Becoming withdrawn and isolated
- › Not looking after their personal hygiene
- › Not eating enough or eating too much
- › Oversleeping or not sleeping enough

### Self-harm and suicidal thinking

Less common but more extreme symptoms of depression are self-harm and suicidal thinking (or 'suicidal ideation'). Self-harm sometimes occurs as a result of certain difficulties and can take many different forms. However, there are coping mechanisms that can help prevent this from occurring. This includes changing your surroundings, letting it all out by crying, listening to a play list, and writing a journal.

Suicidal thoughts may or may not lead to suicide attempts, but young people need to be taken seriously if they express thoughts like these. If you have a friend who is having difficulty or struggling with depression, you can help save their life by talking to them and listening to them. Ask how they are feeling. In cases of severe self-harm or suicidal thinking, the young person in question may need immediate medical attention. They should not be left alone under any circumstances.

It is important to note that adolescents with bi-polar disorders and those suffering from psychosis are also at risk of self-harm and suicide, as well as those with no history of depression who are suffering difficult life circumstances. If you or someone you know are suffering from a severe form of depression – whether they have received a diagnosis or not – speak to someone who can help you.

### How is Depression Treated?

GPs can make diagnoses of depression but may refer someone with depression – very likely in the case of children and adolescents – to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist will decide on the best course of treatment.

Treatments for depression can include medications, counselling, psychotherapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) - which involves working with the patient to systematically alter negative thought patterns and behaviours.

It is important to maintain open, non-judgmental communication when a diagnosis of depression is made. In terms of school attendance and academic performance, the best thing to do is to think of the condition of depression in the same terms as a chronic physical illness which could keep you from school. So on days when the person suffering from depression is unable to cope with school, they should ask to be excused.

DON'T FORGET

**Failure is always temporary,  
giving up makes it permanent**