

Factsheet for parents

We all have to deal with different kinds of emotions; sometimes we are happy and sometimes we are sad. Depression occurs when sad emotions become overwhelming and never seem to go away. It can greatly affect how a child or young person is able to participate in life, as well as their relationship with you and others.

Do children and young people get depressed?

Yes they do and sometimes more than we might imagine. They are typically more dependent and vulnerable, less well defended and more sensitive to what is happening around them than adults. A young person who is depressed may have low spirits, feel inadequate and be downcast and stressed. They may feel guilty or responsible, worried or lonely. They are more sensitive and because of their relative inexperience, less resilient.

Some of the things that can deeply affect children and young people include:

- Losing their parents whether because of divorce or separation, or through bereavement
- Losing their pets or favourite toys or possessions
- Not being loved or listened to, feeling left out
- Changing school, moving home, losing friends
- Being abused physically, sexually or emotionally

They may also worry a lot about:

- Their parents arguing or their parents health
- Their bodies, getting ill or feeling abnormal
- Sex and relationships
- Exams, not doing well

You may find that they simply feel unhappy while recognising that their day to day life is relatively ok.

What about babies or toddlers, do they get depressed?

Babies and toddlers may not be able to talk about their feelings but they do show them in different ways. They react to the moods of those who care for them and become worried if they do not get the love and security they need.

They could become fretful, clingy and unable to settle or sleep, have nightmares or they could become quiet and withdrawn. They might become picky about food, go off their food altogether or have other problems like bed wetting.

Take time to talk to your baby/toddler in soft tones, singing can be soothing even if you can't hold a note! Make lots of eye contact, smile and laugh with them and you can't beat telling them "I love you".

When should I be worried?

Depression is not always the easiest problem to spot or get a child to admit to. Some children can talk about feeling unhappy, but others are only able to show how they feel through the way they behave. Depression can show itself in a number of ways, like self harm, substance misuse, eating disorders and even bullying.

Some things to look out for might be:

- A child who finds it hard to concentrate, loses interest in work and play
- They refuse to go to school, or play truant
- They complain of feeling bored or lonely, even when they have friends
- They become irritable, moody and difficult to control
- They lack confidence
- They blame themselves if things go wrong
- They are disruptive at school, steal or do other things that lead to them being punished.

When should we worry about our teenagers?

Teenagers are often moody and uncommunicative, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are depressed. It is just part of normal adolescence. However, some teenagers get stuck and seem to get overwhelmed.

Here are some of the signs to watch out for:

- Being extremely moody and irritable
- Giving up interests, but not finding new ones
- Losing interest or not doing well at school or work
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Becoming withdrawn and losing touch with friends
- Not looking after themselves
- Not eating enough or eating too much
- Being very self-critical
- Sleeping badly or sleeping too much

Some teenagers may express or escape from these feelings through acting recklessly. They may take drugs, drink too much, behave promiscuously or generally put themselves in dangerous situations.

Teenagers who are very depressed can become preoccupied with harmful thoughts. They may attempt to harm themselves, for example by taking too many tablets or cutting their arms.

It is therefore important to seek help if your child is experiencing depression, or is displaying symptoms of it. (See our contacts section later for who can help you.)

How do I get help?

Children and young people need support to make sense of depressing feelings – they need a caring adult to help them understand and deal with their feelings otherwise their problems can become worse and continue to be with them into adulthood.

If they don't want to talk to you or someone else they know then telephone helplines and e-mail services offer confidential support and encouragement. Your job may just be to encourage them to pick up the phone or send an e-mail, let them know that you are there for them and that they are not the only person struggling with their feelings.

Don't forget that your GP may be able to help – they can discuss with you what help is available, refer your child if appropriate (maybe to CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and some doctors have counsellors on their staff.

Support and Advice

Reading

[Raising a Moody Child: How to cope with Depression and Bipolar Disorder](#)

This book describes how treatment works and what additional steps parents can take at home to help

children with mood disorders. (by Jill S Goldberg Arnold and Mary A Fristad)

Published by Guilford Press (2004 – ISBN 157230930X)

The Depressed Child: A Parent's Guide for Rescuing Kids

This book tackles the thinking patterns and beliefs that almost always underlie depression in children and teenagers. It emphasises how parents can talk to their children about what they are thinking and feeling. The book explores how children develop a negative set of beliefs about themselves and helps parents learn how to modify their children's self-perception. (by Douglas A Riley)
Published by Taylor Trade Publishing (2003 – ISBN 0878331875)

The following books are available from the Sheffield Information Link library:

Helping Children Cope with Anxiety (J. Eckersley; 2006)

“ This book looks at how the pressures of twenty-first-century living can affect children up to the age of 16, and what parents can do to help.”

Helping Children Cope with Change and Loss (R. Wells; 2003)

“This book explains how we can help our children to prepare for and live with the changes life brings, from starting a new school or coping with stepfamilies to the trauma of coping with the death of a parent or grandparent, and to feel safe and secure.”

Coping with an Anxious or Depressed Child (S. Cartwright-Hatton; 2007)

“Written specifically for parents [this text] uses the latest clinical research in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to provide clear, effective methods to tackle anxiety and depression in children.”

Wise Guides: Self-Esteem (A. Naik; 2005)

This book is aimed at the young person rather than parents
“This essential guide provides you with lots of hints and tips on how to think positively about your friendships, your family, your body and your life. For a practical guide towards a more positive future this book has the answers.”

Website Contacts

For more information you could check out the following websites:

www.asksid.net put depression or anxiety in the keyword box

www.childline.org.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.counselling.co.uk

www.thecalmzone.net Help for boys and young men aged 16-35 years suffering from depression and low self esteem.

www.getconnected.org.uk This service provides a unique, free and confidential helpline for young people, acting as a signpost to relevant sources of help.

You could telephone

Sheffield NSPCC Young People's Centre

35-37 George Street, Sheffield S1 2PF
Tel: 0114-228 9200.

They offer counselling and support for young people. Referral should be by the young person themselves not parents or carers

Careline **020 8514 1177**

Mon – Fri 10am – 4pm & 7pm – 10pm

Confidential crisis telephone counselling for children, young people and adults. They can refer you to other organisations and support groups.

Childline **0800 1111** (24hrs freephone)

Childline is free and confidential – it's for children and young people who are concerned about any problem. Lines are often busy but do keep trying.

Young Minds - Parent Helpline 0808 802 5544

Open Mon and Fri 9:30am – 4pm

Tues and Thurs 1pm – 4pm

Young Minds is a national charity committed to improving the mental health of babies, children and young people. The parents' information service is a free, confidential service providing advice to any adult who may have concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

BACP House, 15 St. John's Business Park, Leicestershire, LE17 4HB

Client Information: 01455 883316

General: 01455 883300

Samaritans **08457 909090** – 24 hrs a day

Or try www.samaritans.org.uk