



# Supporting children and young people experiencing depression

Your role is not to diagnose depression. However, you may notice changes in a child or young person's behaviour and mood, which might be signs of depression. If you have concerns about someone's mental health and wellbeing, there are a range of ways you can support them

## Be supportive and make time to listen

**The first step is to have a conversation. Ask children and young people how they're feeling, let them know it's OK to seek help, and that you're ready to listen to whatever they want to say.**

If the child or young person doesn't want to talk, respect their choice but don't let this throw you off – it's OK to keep reminding them that you care and will listen to their story another time. If the child or young person does wish to talk, help them open up by showing interest and listening to them talk about school, friends and home. If they have difficulty explaining how they're feeling, suggest some feeling words (for example, angry or sad) to stimulate discussion.

Talking about problems in a supportive way can often start to improve a child or young person's

mood. If this doesn't improve within a few weeks, it's important to seek additional support.

Learn more about common signs and symptoms of [depression](#) in children and young people.

## Help children and young people to problem-solve

If a situation has caused them distress, help them solve the problem or find ways to improve it.

## Talk with your school's wellbeing staff, psychologist or counsellor

Such discussions may be useful in deciding the next steps to take in helping the child or young person. It may lead to a meeting with the family to talk further. Remember to also keep confidentiality in mind.

## Connect with families

It's important to appropriately share information with families and find out whether the child or young person's mood is similar at home. When mood and behaviour changes are happening at home and at

school, it can suggest the mental health issues may be more serious.

### **Address school-based triggers**

If you believe that school-based triggers, such as bullying, may be impacting the child or young person's mental health and wellbeing, raise it with leadership to ensure issues are addressed appropriately.

### **Give positive feedback**

While this is important for all children and young people, it's even more critical when an individual is depressed. Your positive feedback will help to counter their tendency to tune into only negative feedback about themselves, which can maintain low mood.

### **Provide opportunities for success**

Let the child or young person know you have confidence in their ability and support them to succeed socially and academically.

### **Encourage getting involved**

Praise and encourage children and young people for their efforts. Try to involve them in physical activity and enjoyable events. Encouraging children and young people to keep up with normal routines and activities helps to distract them from negative thinking patterns.

### **Model positive actions**

Label experiences to encourage interactions that promote positivity. For example, with younger children, you might say, "That was fun", "I liked Jack's joke – it made me smile" or "I like happy stories – they make me feel happy too."

For older children and adolescents, you might say, "I can see you put a lot of effort into achieving such a good grade for this project. That must be very rewarding" or "It's great that you're thinking about how to look after yourself. Sometimes when I'm going through a difficult time, I find it helpful having someone to talk through my options with. Perhaps we can work out together how we can get some information or help."

### **Foster positive social relationships**

Children and young people who are depressed may withdraw from social contact. However, friends can

provide important support. Remind other students about how to help everyone feel they belong.

### **Provide extra learning support**

Help students to catch up once they start to feel better. This support is particularly important, as falling behind in schoolwork can cause stress that may aggravate depression.

## **If more support is required**

If the supportive actions you've tried don't seem to be helping, the child or young person may require further support. Referrals to health professionals should be done with the child or young person (depending on their age), wellbeing staff and families.

### **What support is available?**

Different health professionals (such as GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists) offer different types of supports and treatments for depression. Professional support can help the child or young person and their family learn skills to tackle the depression and feel better about life and themselves.

Evidence shows that professional psychological support can reduce the time it takes to recover from depression and decrease the likelihood that another episode of depression will occur. Treatment may include cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), a professional support plan, and/or antidepressants.

### **Be You Professional Learning**

Learn more about inquiring sensitively about your concerns with children, young people, their families and your colleagues in the [Inquire](#) module. Learn more about providing support for children, young people and their families by helping them access information and support, in the [Provide](#) module.

## **External links**

Beyond Blue – [Types of depression](#)

Emerging Minds – [The role of depression literacy and stigma in how parents perceive and respond to adolescent depressive symptoms: Lessons for childhood mental health](#)

Orygen – [Depression and young people](#)

ReachOut – [Treatments for depression](#)