



## Depression factsheet

**NEWARK**  
ACADEMY

### **About this leaflet**

This is one in a series of leaflets for parents, teachers and young people entitled *Mental Health and Growing Up*. This leaflet looks at how to recognise depression, and what you can do to help yourself or someone else.

- Sarah, 15, talks about her depression

### **What is depression?**

Most people, children as well as adults, feel low or 'blue' occasionally. Feeling sad is a normal reaction to experiences that are stressful or upsetting. However, when these feelings go on and on, take over your usual self and interfere with your whole life, it can become an illness. This illness is called 'depression'.

### **How common is it?**

Depression usually starts in the teen years, more commonly as you near adulthood. It is less common in children under 12 years old. It can affect anybody, although it is also more common in girls compared to boys.

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### **How do I know if I have depression?**

Some of the symptoms you are suffering from depression include:

- being moody and irritable - easily upset, 'ratty' or tearful

- becoming withdrawn - avoiding friends, family and regular activities
- feeling guilty or bad, being self-critical and self-blaming - hating yourself
- feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- feeling hopeless and wanting to die
- finding it difficult to concentrate
- not looking after your personal appearance
- changes in sleep pattern: sleeping too little or too much
- feeling tired
- not interested in eating, eating little or too much
- suffering aches and pains, such as headaches or stomach-aches
- feeling you are not good looking.

If you have all or most of these signs and have had them over a long period of time, it may mean that you are depressed. You may find it very difficult to talk about how you are feeling.

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### **What causes depression?**

There is no specific cause for depression. It is usually caused by a mixture of things, rather than any one thing alone such as:

- or personal experiences can be a trigger. These include family breakdown, the death or loss of someone you love, neglect, abuse, bullying and physical illness.
- Depression can start if too many changes happen in your life too quickly.
- You are more likely to suffer from depression if you are under a lot of stress, have no one to share their worries with.
- Depression may run in families and can be more common if you already suffer from physical illness or difficulties.
- Depression seems to be linked with chemical changes in the part of brain that controls mood.

### **What can I do if I am feeling low?**

You can try a few things to see if it helps you feel better.

Simply talking to someone you trust, and who you feel understands, can lighten the burden. It can also make it easier to work out practical solutions to problems. For example, if you feel unable to do your homework, letting your family and teachers know can be helpful for you to get some support to complete your work.

Here are some things to try:

- talk to someone whom you trust and can help
  - try to do some physical activity and eat healthy food
  - try to keep yourself occupied by doing activities, even if you feel you do not really enjoy them
  - try not to stay all alone in your room, especially during the day
  - don't overstress yourself and allow for fun and leisure time.
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## **Where can I get help?**

### **How parents/family and teachers can help?**

When you have depression, you may feel ashamed and guilty of the way you are. You may worry about upsetting others especially family, or being told you are making it up or blamed it is your fault by telling them how you feel. It can also be very hard to put your feelings into words. However, many young people in same situation feel sense of relief at being understood once they have talked about it. Letting others know about how you feel is important for getting the right help and support.

### **When should I get more help?**

Many young people will get better on their own with support and understanding. If the depression is dragging on and causing serious difficulties, it's important to seek treatment. Sometimes when you are feeling low, you may think or try to use drugs or alcohol to forget your feelings. You may see no hope and feel like running away from it all. Doing this only makes the situation worse. When this happens it is important that you let others know and get help.

### **Where can I get help?**

Your GP, or sometimes school nurse, will be able to advise you about what help is available and to arrange a referral to the local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). They will see you and your family and discuss what is the right treatment for you.

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## **How is depression treated?**

When the depression is not very bad, which means you are still able to do your daily activities like going to school, you may find psychological therapies also called talking therapies helpful.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is one of these which is effective for treating depression.

Other talking therapies which can be helpful. These can be family therapy and interpersonal therapy, both of which may be available from your CAMHS service.

When your depression is severe and has been going on for long time, you may find it difficult to even talk about it. In this situation, medications can help to lift your mood.

Medications called 'antidepressants' are usually used for this condition. They need to be prescribed by specialist child and adolescent psychiatrists after a careful assessment. If you are given medication, you may need physical health check-up beforehand, and then you will need regular check-ups once you have started on the medication.

Medications are usually given for few months and sometimes may need to be taken for a longer time. It is important that if you are prescribed medication that you take it the way it has been prescribed for you ( i.e the right dose and timing).

**Remember you are not alone - depression is a common problem and can be overcome.**

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### **Sarah's story, aged 15**

"I was 15. They took me to see the doctor because they thought I was a bit down and I had started cutting. I hadn't noticed much, cutting made me feel better and I just felt they were having a bit of a go really. It was only when I started to talk more, that I started to realise how much I had changed, I used to be happy, not all the time, but I couldn't now - not like I used to.

I was falling out with my teachers - they said I wasn't getting on with work and it made me cross. I was trying but I just couldn't get on with it not like I did in year 8 and 9. The doctor said it could be my concentration. I hadn't thought of that I just thought I was thick.

Then when he asked about other things, I started to see, I couldn't sleep properly and didn't feel like going out to play football anymore. I said it was just boring, but as I started to feel better, I did play again and I think saying it was boring was all part of my depression. That was the same with my family, I mean you don't get on all time do you and they are still a pain sometimes now, but when I was depressed it was like we were always arguing, I just couldn't talk to them and they just wound me up.

It wasn't till they talked to me and things started to change, that was when I looked back and realised how depressed I was."

## Further info

**Campaign against living miserable** - A campaign and charity targeting young men with a helpline, magazine and online community, but CALM listens to **anyone** who needs help or support.

**ChildLine** - Provides a free and confidential telephone service for children. Helpline: 0800 1111.

**Depression Alliance** - Help and information about depression; depression symptoms and self help groups.

**Epic friends** - Mental health problems are common. This website is all about helping you to help your friends who might be struggling emotionally.

**YoungMinds** - Provides information and advice on child mental health issues. YoungMinds have also developed **HeadMeds** which gives young people in England **general** information about medication. HeadMeds does **not** give you medical advice. Please talk to your Doctor or anyone else who is supporting you about your own situation because everyone is different.

**Rethink Mental Illness** - Mental health charity helping people with mental health problems and have a section for young people.

## Further help

**Changing Minds: Mental Health: What it is, What to do, Where to go?:** This CD-ROM is designed for 13-17 years. It includes a wide range of resources - audio, visual, video and written materials - and a wealth of reference for further information and help, including a section on depression.