

Young people, feelings and depression

Parent Easy Guide 71



Parents worry when their teenager seems upset or angry a lot of the time. It can be hard to know what to do, especially if they don't talk about what is bothering them.

- > Young people feel lots of emotions as a normal part of growing up.
- > Learning to cope with negative feelings is an important life skill for young people. Being 'good at feelings' is more important than feeling happy all the time.
- > Parents can help by being available when their child wants to talk, and helping them work through problems. Don't leave them to sort things out alone.
- > Some young people may be diagnosed with depression.

Young people and feelings

Young people's lives can be complex. They are dealing with many changes as they grow up. Their bodies are changing and they are forming their own identity and place in the world. They are working out how to get along with friends and family. Some may also be dealing with difficult issues e.g. sexuality issues, alcohol or drug use, relationship problems or violence.

Young people's thoughts and feelings can be greatly affected by all that's going on.

It's normal for them to feel sad, angry, worried, scared, shamed or frustrated at times. They may feel unhappy sometimes for no clear reason.

These negative feelings may stay with them, or come and go over weeks and months.

When they feel low, young people may:

- > be tearful, sad or angry;
- > feel worthless or guilty;
- > lack motivation or energy;
- > lack interest in things they used to enjoy;
- > have poor concentration or make bad decisions;
- > stay away from family and friends;
- > say they feel alone;
- > eat more or less than usual and gain or lose weight;
- > have sleep problems.

Dealing with feelings

Most young people want their negative feelings to stop and to feel happy again. They may:

- > try to mask their feelings by using drugs or alcohol;
- > take risks such as fast driving or unsafe sex;
- > withdraw from others;
- > engage in self-harm.

Trying to escape bad feelings in these ways often makes things worse.

The best way for young people to deal with negative thoughts and feelings is to 'open up' and talk about them and what may be causing them.

It will help them avoid emotional problems in the future if they learn to deal with their feelings before an issue becomes a major problem.

How parents can help

You can help by not leaving your child to deal with their situation alone. Be available when they need to talk or need your help to work out an issue e.g. bullying or abuse.

It can help if young people 'open up' and talk about their negative feelings, and what may be causing them.



You could also:

- > help them to build networks of supportive relationships. It's best if they have more than one group of people to talk to e.g. family, school friends, work friends, sport teams, hobby groups;
- > notice the good things they do and praise them, as long as this doesn't make them feel uncomfortable;
- > make time to do things with them, one-on-one and as a family;
- > avoid family conflict as much as you can;
- > help them to deal with problems as they arise rather than let them build up;
- > help them to do things you know they enjoy, and to be involved in social and family activities;
- > help them to eat well, be active and get plenty of sleep;
- > discourage use of alcohol and drugs.

Try not to get angry if they blame you for their problems. Accept that there will be good days and bad days.

It's not usually helpful to:

- > tell them to deal with their feelings by keeping busy or trying to forget them;
- > tell them to 'snap out of it' or 'get their act together';
- > ignore or avoid them.

Talking with your child

Some young people find it hard to talk with parents about difficult things. It can help to:

- > choose a time and place where you are both at ease and will have time to talk;
- > be open and honest. Tell them you care about them and will always listen or talk when they want to;
- > ask open-ended questions e.g. 'is there something troubling you?'
- > show that you've noticed how they seem to be feeling and that you care e.g. 'I'm worried that you seem so upset at the moment';
- > listen to them. Young people sometimes want to talk without hearing advice. Save suggestions for another time and make neutral comments e.g. 'I can see how that would upset you';
- > stay calm and in control. Be fair and consistent and think before you react;
- > be prepared to admit that you don't know everything;
- > apologise if you get things wrong. This teaches valuable lessons e.g. being flexible, communicating well and taking responsibility for your words and actions.

Let your child know you care about them and how they are feeling. Be ready to talk with them, or just listen.

Getting help

Parents

It might be time to get help if:

- > talking with your child hasn't helped and you are still worried;
- > your child's school, work, friendships or social activities are affected;
- > your child's low feelings persist.

If you are worried about your child, talking with your doctor is a good place to start.

Young people

Tell your child that everyone has problems that they can't work out alone. Encourage them to talk with their doctor, school counsellor, or youth health service.

Let them choose whether they want you to go with them or not. Don't be upset about their choice. It may be easier for them to talk without you there.

If your child doesn't want to talk about their feelings, says that nothing is wrong, or won't talk with a professional, you may have to accept that it's not the right time for them to get help. There's only so much you can do. Be patient until they are ready.

Depression

Some young people who feel low for periods of time may be diagnosed with depression.

People sometimes say they are 'depressed' when they feel sad or low. But depression is more than short-term sadness or a passing phase. It can be a serious condition that needs professional diagnosis and treatment. It can affect the person's thoughts, mood, behaviour and health. It leaves them feeling down for much of the time and makes it hard to cope from day to day.

Sometimes the causes of depression are clear, but sometimes they are not.

Depression can be caused by recent events, long-term stress or a mix of both. It is more likely:

- > if someone else in the family has depression;
- > if someone has low self-esteem, is anxious or overly-sensitive.

Some young people who feel low for periods of time may be diagnosed with depression.

Self harm and suicide

Most people who are unhappy or diagnosed with depression do not hurt themselves (self harm) or attempt suicide. But some young people do think about these and act on their thoughts.

Some young people self harm by cutting their skin. This causes pain that helps the pain of their thoughts and feelings to go away for a while.

If your child is doing this it's important to let them know that you are worried about them. Seek professional help.

Some young people consider suicide. Usually they don't want to die; they just want the pain of their feelings to stop.

Signs that a young person may be thinking about suicide include:

- > talk or threats of suicide;
- > previous attempts;
- > hints e.g. 'I won't be a problem for you much longer';
- > giving away their possessions or getting things in order.

All threats of suicide or self-harm should be taken seriously.

Seek professional help. Some contacts are provided at the end of this Guide. Give these contacts to your child too.

Some people think that talking about suicide may put the idea into a child's head. But talking openly about suicide can help a young person to talk about their feelings and look for other ways to stop their pain. Talking also helps you to find out what your child is thinking.

If your child is thinking of suicide, help them work out how they will stay safe now, and in the weeks to come. Ask them what help they need from you.

All threats of suicide and self-harm should be taken seriously.

Looking after yourself

Parents can feel tired, angry or upset when their child is unhappy or depressed.

It is important to look after yourself so that you can help your child. Take time to relax and do things you enjoy. Try to exercise, eat well and get plenty of sleep. Talk with supportive family members and friends.

Want more information?

Lifeline: Phone 13 11 14

24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health services
www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: Phone 1300 659 467

24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Crisis counselling for people at risk of suicide and their carers
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Kids Helpline: Phone 1800 55 1800

24 hours a day, 7 days a week
For phone, web or email counselling, resources and activities for young people
www.kidshelp.com.au

Youth Healthline: Phone 1300 13 17 19

9am–5pm Monday to Friday
A telephone service for young people aged 12 to 25 years

Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS):

9am–5pm Monday to Friday
Counselling services for children and young people 0–18 years

- > Western Region: Phone 8341 1222
email CAMHS.western@health.sa.gov.au
- > Eastern Region: Phone 8207 8999
email CAMHS.eastern@health.sa.gov.au
- > Northern Region: Phone 8252 0133
email CAMHS.northern@health.sa.gov.au
- > Country Service: Phone 1800 819 089
email CAMHS.country@health.sa.gov.au
- > Adolescent Services Enfield Campus:
Phone 8269 3844
Statewide service for young people with complex mental health needs

The Second Story:

Free, confidential health service and support for young people 12–25 years
9am–5pm Monday to Friday

- > City: Phone 8232 0233
57 Hyde St
Adelaide
- > North: Phone 8255 3477
Gillingham St
Elizabeth
- > South: Phone 8326 6053
50A Beach Rd
Christies Beach

www.reachout.com.au

Information and resources on topics including depression and mental health issues

beyondblue: Phone 1300 22 4636

www.youthbeyondblue.com
Information and resources for young people, parents and carers on depression, anxiety and other mental health issues

www.headroom.net.au

Mental health and wellbeing information for young people, parents and carers

www.headspace.org.au

The National Youth Mental Health Foundation provides health advice, support and information to young people 12–25 years

www.cyh.com

Information on young people's health and parenting

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

For more Parent Easy Guides e.g. 'Living with teens', 'Young people and drugs', 'Young people and parties,' 'Cybersafety', 'Abuse of parents' and parent groups in your area

Parenting SA
Women's and Children's Health Network
Telephone (08) 8303 1660
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

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Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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Parenting SA

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