

# Depression and Young People



## Key points to remember:

- One in four young people are diagnosed with a mental illness with depression being one of the most common
- Depression is often associated with behavioural changes including social withdrawal, decrease in school performance or an increase in risky behaviour (including alcohol or drugs)
- Seek help immediately if a young person talk about suicide.

Depression is one of the most common health problem for young people in Australia. Research suggests that one in four (25%) young people are currently living with a mental health disorder (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007).

Feeling sad or down occasionally is a part of life. You might feel sad or worried about typical life events such as exams, relationship breakups, fighting with family or friends, changing school or moving house. For many young people these feelings come and go and are short-term. Sometimes, however, these feelings of sadness or being 'moody' last for weeks or months and begin to impact on your everyday life.

If you or a young person you know, feels miserable most of the time and finds it difficult to get motivated, they may have depression. Symptoms of depression in young people are similar to adults, but there are some differences.

## Symptoms of depression include:

- Decrease in feelings of self-worth (self-esteem)
- Feelings of irritability, anger or restlessness
- Changes in sleep patterns (including insomnia or excessive sleeping)
- Social withdrawal or not wanting to spend time with family and friends
- Decreased performance at school
- Feeling empty, sad, hopeless or worthless most of the time

- Changes in weight or appetite
- Reduced or no sex drive
- Difficulty concentrating and completing tasks or poor memory
- Low energy levels
- Inability to enjoy or look forward to things you usually enjoy
- Change in behaviour including increase in risk-taking behaviour (e.g reckless driving, sexual relationships or drug and alcohol use).

Some young people experiment with alcohol and other drugs to help them feel better at difficult times. Unfortunately, the effects are only short-term and once they have worn off, alcohol and other drugs can leave you feeling much worse in the long term.

Some young people who are depressed may not show obvious signs of depression, however parents or other significant adults in their life may notice some behavioural changes that may suggest depression. These include:

- Social withdrawal
- Lower marks at school
- Increase in risk-taking behaviour
- Use of alcohol and drugs

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It is often hard to distinguish between developmentally appropriate behaviours and depressive symptoms. Especially when the young person is developing a new role of independence within their relationships and having to make life choices around academic and career paths.

## When to get help?

If you or someone you know might be depressed it is important to seek professional help from a general practitioner (GP) or a mental health professional. A school counsellor, school psychologist or a trusted adult whom the young person feels comfortable talking with may also be a good support.

## Helplines:

**youth beyond blue** Support Service  
Tel. **1300 22 4636**

**Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**

**Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**

**Suicide Line** Tel. **1300 651 251**

**Head space** Tel. **1800 650 890**

**SANE Australia** Helpline  
Tel. **1800 187 263**