

Young people, feelings and depression



Young people deal with many changes as they go through puberty and the stage of development called adolescence. Changes in the brain and hormones result in changes to their body as well as how they think and feel. It is normal for them to experience lots of emotions that can change quickly.

Some young people struggle with ongoing low feelings and may even be diagnosed with depression. Parents may feel unsure about how to help but studies show that support from parents is a big factor in helping them cope. It is also important to get professional help early if needed.

- deal with problems as they arise rather than let things build up
- be aware of their 'self-talk'. A positive view will help them feel better about themselves
- accept their emotions and learn to notice what these feelings are telling them. Knowing how to manage feelings takes time and practice but is an important skill that will help them do well in life
- set appropriate limits and understand about risks
- find accurate information that can help them make good decisions, especially about important things like alcohol and drugs, sexuality, relationships
- have realistic goals. Achieving even small goals builds confidence and motivation.

Building good mental health

Starting early to support children and young people to look after their mental health and wellbeing is really important. Good mental health habits during adolescence provide a solid foundation for positive mental health into the future. You can help young people to:

- get plenty of sleep. Young people need at least nine hours each night. Those who are sleep deprived don't do as well at school and are at higher risk for depression
- eat well and be active. Even small amounts of regular physical activity can help reduce stress
- find activities they enjoy, such as sports or hobbies, and ways to express their feelings, such as talking, writing, art, dance or performance
- develop healthy ways to relax and unwind. Help them understand that drinking or taking drugs doesn't solve problems. It might seem they help cope with stress or tough situations but over time they can affect mental health

Being warm and loving, setting appropriate limits and finding the positives in your child or young person helps them build good mental health.

Being connected

It is also important for young people to be connected with others. Working out who they are, finding purpose and where they belong are key tasks during this period of their development. These things are worked out through engaging with others, forming and expressing their ideas and trying new things.

Encourage your young person to:

- be involved in social and family activities
- have more than one group of people to talk to, eg family, friends, sport teams, hobby groups
- find safe adult mentors who can assist them to work out what is important, bring new experiences into their life and help them pursue their interests and passions.



Young people and difficult feelings

It is normal for young people to feel stressed, sad, worried, scared, embarrassed, frustrated or angry at times. These feelings can be about everyday things or in response to something they are dealing with, eg stress at school, issues with friends or a relationship break-up. However, all young people are different and will deal with feelings in different ways. Some are fairly easy-going and don't get too stressed by events or their feelings. Others might have strong feelings and reactions and find it harder to learn to calm down and deal with things.

While most young people experience difficult feelings, they usually don't last too long. However, if they feel low, sad, anxious or irritable much of the time, it is not a normal part of adolescence. 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 low concentration or make poor decisions
- stay away from family and friends
- say they feel alone
- eat more/less than usual and gain/lose weight
- have sleep problems.

It is important to help young people deal with emotional ups and downs rather than leave them to work things out by themselves.

Talking with young people

Having a trusted adult to talk to is a great way for young people to deal with their feelings and work things out. Even if they don't want to talk with you right now, let them know you love them and want to help. Be available when they are ready to talk. Listening is more important than having answers.

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

- spend regular one-on-one time with them to build your relationship. Choose places or activities where you are both at ease and which make it easy to talk
- tell them you care about them and will always be there for them
- show that you've noticed how they are feeling, eg 'You seem really upset lately'
- ask open-ended questions, such as 'I wonder if there is something troubling you' or 'How are things for you at the moment?' Listen to their answers and seek to understand rather than give advice or look for solutions. Acknowledge their emotions and show empathy by making comments like 'I can see how that would upset you', or 'That must have been hard'
- encourage them to talk with other safe adults who can support them.

Let your young person know you are there for them no matter what. Don't give up - they still need you.

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
- a young person has low self-esteem, is anxious or overly-sensitive.



Self-harm and suicide

Most people who are unhappy or diagnosed with a mental illness do not hurt themselves (self-harm). However, some young people self-harm by scratching, burning or cutting their skin. The pain of self-harming helps the pain of their thoughts and feelings go away for a while.

Young people who harm themselves are usually trying to find ways to deal with feeling very distressed or overwhelmed. While they may not intend to kill themselves, self-harm can sometimes cause significant injury or even accidental death. If your child or young person is self-harming it is important to let them know you are worried about them and want to help. It is often necessary to seek professional help.

Some young people may also consider suicide. Mostly they don't want to die, they just want the pain of their feelings to stop. Suicidal thoughts or actions usually result from feeling hopeless about life in general rather than about a single event or just one thing in their life.

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

- talk or threats about killing themselves
- previous attempts
- having a plan about how they will do it, and the means to carry it out
- hints, eg 'I won't be a problem for you much longer'
- giving away their possessions or saying goodbye to loved ones.

Some people think discussing suicide with young people may put the idea into their head. But talking openly about suicide and self-harm can help them talk about their feelings and look for other ways to stop their pain. Talking also helps you find out what they are thinking.

All talk of suicide and self-harm should be taken seriously. Seek professional help early.

Getting help

It might be time to get help if:

- talking with your young person hasn't helped and you are still worried
- their school, work, friendships or social activities are affected
- their low feelings persist.

Help your young person understand that everyone has problems at times that they can't work out alone. Encourage them to seek help early. Some options are to:

- **contact an online service** that specialises in helping young people through difficult times, such as Kids Helpline, ReachOut or eHeadspace. Parents can contact these services too – see end of this Guide
- **contact Headspace**, a youth mental health service. See Headspace website to find your nearest office
- **download an app** that helps support young people's mental health – see end of this Guide
- **speak to a school counsellor**
- **see a doctor** or other health professional. They may be able to provide a mental health plan and help you find the best service for your young person
- **phone the Mental Health Enquiry Line** at the Adelaide Primary Health Network on 1300 898 213. They can help you access a range of free mental health services in metropolitan Adelaide.

If your young person doesn't want to talk to you about their feelings, says nothing is wrong or won't talk with anyone else, you may have to accept it is not the right time for them to get help. Be patient until they are ready and let them know you are always there to support them.

If your young person is at risk of harm to themselves or others, seek professional help even if they don't want you to.





Looking after yourself

Parents can feel tired, angry or upset when their young person is unhappy or depressed for long periods.

It is important to look after yourself so you are a good role model and better able to help them. Take time to relax and do things you enjoy. Try to exercise, eat well and get plenty of sleep. Talk with supportive family and friends. Get professional support if needed.

Be a good role model and find positive ways to take care of yourself and deal with your own emotions and challenges.

Want more information?

Emergency

Phone 000 for emergency assistance

SA Health Mental Triage Service

Phone 13 14 65, 24 hours

For assistance in a mental health emergency, information and referrals
www.mhcsa.org.au/contact/need-help-now

Suicide Call Back Service

Phone 1300 659 467, 24 hours

Crisis counselling for people at risk of suicide and their carers www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Lifeline

Phone 13 11 14, 24 hours

Crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health services. Lifeline Chat is available from 7pm to midnight AEST and Lifeline Text from 6pm to midnight AEST www.lifeline.org.au

Services for young people

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 55 1800, 24 hours

For phone or online counselling and support for children and young people 5 to 25 years and their parents www.kidshelp.com.au

ReachOut

Support for young people up to 25 years dealing with everyday problems or tough times. Has discussion groups, tools and apps for young people, and information for parents www.reachout.com

eheadspace

Phone 1800 650 890, 9am-1am AEST

Free confidential online and phone support and counselling for young people 12-25 years going through tough times, their family and friends <https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace>

Headspace

Find information and support for mental health and wellbeing of young people, family and friends <https://headspace.org.au>

Find your local centre at <https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres>

Youth Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 22 4636, 24 hours

Information and resources about anxiety and depression for young people 12-25, parents and carers. Has online chat 3pm to 12am, and online forums www.youthbeyondblue.com

Adelaide Primary Health Network

Phone the Mental Health Enquiry Line on 1300 898 213 for information about accessing a range of free mental health services in metropolitan Adelaide <https://adelaidephn.com.au>

If the above services have not been successful in resolving the young person's difficulties or if the difficulties significantly impact functioning, please contact:

CAMHS Connect

Phone 1300 222 647, Mon to Fri, 9am-5pm

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provides services for children and young people with severe or complex mental health needs www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/mentalhealth/index.html

Parenting

Raising Children Network

Parenting information on a range of topics, including depression in children and teenagers www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Living with young people', 'Young people, alcohol and drugs', 'Young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual', 'Young people and parties', 'Young people, body image and food', 'Young parents', 'Cyber safety', 'Violence towards parents' and 'Bullying' www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Free apps to support young people's mental health

Download from the App Store or Google Play

ReachOut Australia

<https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps>

Sleep Well, Be Well - Putting in place good sleep/wake patterns to improve mood, energy and wellbeing <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/recharge>

Breakup Shakeup - Supporting young people through the challenges of a break-up <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/breakup-shakeup>

Smiling Mind - A meditation app for young people <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/smiling-mind>

Youth Beyond Blue

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/young-people>

Check in - Tips for having conversations with a friend about how they are going <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/about-our-work/young-people/the-check-in-app>

Headspace

The Headspace App - Guided meditation and mindfulness <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>

Anxiety Canada

MindShift - Helping young people learn how to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking and take charge of anxiety <https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt>



Government of South Australia

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

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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