

# depression

– when the ‘**blues**’ won’t **go away**

Everyone gets the ‘blues’ now and then, but people who feel down for more than a few weeks may be depressed. Adolescence is a period of significant change and development. For some adolescents, it can be a difficult and confusing period of life and this can make them vulnerable to depression.

**Recent surveys suggest up to 1 in 5 people will experience depression at some time.**

It can be hard to know if your adolescent is depressed. After all, teenagers are often moody – but depression is more than this. Depression is a serious illness, and it is important your adolescent gets help, just like you would seek professional advice for a physical illness.

Sometimes it can be easy to see why your teenager is depressed. But often depression can appear from nowhere.

Teenagers don’t always understand *why* they feel down, or even know *how*





to express what they feel. This makes it hard for parents to work out when the 'blues' have turned into something more serious.

Many depressed young people appear to be angry or irritable rather than sad. They may become hostile, take risks and push people away.

If left untreated, the problem can spiral into alcohol and drug use. This can lead to more problems and make their depression worse. In some people, alcohol, drugs, prescription medicine or physical illness can trigger depression. People whose close relatives have depression are also at greater risk of developing the illness.

Many people falsely believe teenagers should be able to shake off the emotional symptoms caused by depression.

"If only they tried hard enough," is often the thought. This is dangerous, as it can make teenagers feel weak or ashamed and discourage them from seeking help. It also fails to recognise that depression is a mental illness.

**The good news is that depression can be treated effectively with counselling and sometimes with medication. With treatment, many people start to feel better in just a few weeks.**

## what are the warning signs?

- ◆ persistent sadness or anger, frequent crying
- ◆ difficulty thinking or concentrating, a worsening of school performance
- ◆ feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness
- ◆ lack of interest in friends, family and activities they previously enjoyed
- ◆ lack of energy, enthusiasm or motivation (feeling slowed down)
- ◆ restlessness, irritability or agitation
- ◆ changes in sleeping patterns
  - not being able to sleep or sleeping more than usual
- ◆ changes in eating patterns
  - eating more or less than usual
- ◆ thoughts of death, suicide or harming themselves.

## what are the causes?

**There is no single cause for depression. It may be a psychological, chemical or social problem, or a combination of any of these.**

- ◆ **Psychological** – life events such as the loss of someone close can lead to feelings of hopelessness about the future
- ◆ **Chemical** – changes in brain chemicals can cause depression
- ◆ **Social** – a reduction in activities or interests can both cause depression and arise from depression.

## what can you do?

**When your teenager is feeling down, it's important to listen and offer help and support them to seek help.**

**Encourage them to:**

- ◆ talk about their feelings (let them know they don't have to carry the whole load)
- ◆ talk to other people they trust
- ◆ ask for help when they need it
- ◆ spend time with their friends
- ◆ join in sports, school activities or hobbies which they enjoy and that help build their confidence
- ◆ get involved in organisations that support them and help them to develop interests
- ◆ exercise (exercise releases brain chemicals which help lift our spirits)
- ◆ find ways to relax (these can be simple such as seeing a movie or going for a walk or a surf)
- ◆ write down what they're thinking or to express their thoughts in other creative ways like painting.

**If your teenager is depressed for a significant period of time it is important to seek professional help.**

**If you or they are not taken seriously at one place then seek help elsewhere until you are both satisfied.**

## where to get help

In an emergency contact your General Practitioner or local hospital Emergency Department  
**24 hour telephone services are:**

- ◆ Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800
- ◆ Lifeline 13 11 14
- ◆ Youthline (youth counselling) 02 9633 3666 (Parramatta).

**For other help, the first point of contact can be:**

- ◆ Your local Area Health Service (during business hours) including community health centres or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.
- ◆ Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians, child psychiatrists and psychologists may also be able to provide help.

**If you would like more information about mental health and services contact:**

- ◆ NSW Association for Mental Health, Mental Health Information Service Monday to Friday, 12.30pm – 4.30pm 02 9816 5688 or 1800 674 200 (freecall outside Sydney)

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