

The Listening Ear Help Sheet: Depression



The Listening Ear
Counselling for Children & Young People

What is depression?

Depression is one of the most common mental health issues experienced by young people aged 12-25. One in four young people will have experienced depression by the end of adolescence.

It's normal to feel 'down' or 'sad' from time to time as we experience different emotional reactions. This can be seen as 'situational depression' where a person may experience a short lived, appropriately low mood due to an unfavourable or distressing situation, for example a death in the family or job loss. Depression can mean that these feelings of sadness last longer than usual, potentially affecting relationships, school or work and prevent you from enjoying life.

There are many different types of depression.

Major depression usually lasts for at least 2 weeks and is characterised by a build-up of depressed feelings and low moods. A young person may experience swings in emotion and seem more irritable than usual. As adolescence presents many changes both physically and emotionally, major depression can often be falsely diagnosed as normal adolescent development.

Dysthymia is a milder form of depression that can exist over months or years and is generally less severe. People experiencing dysthymia may be able to continue living their lives as normal but with less enjoyment. Like major depression, dysthymia can also affect concentration, sleep, energy levels and appetite.

Symptoms of depression in young people

- An unusually sad mood
- Loss of enjoyment in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Lack of energy and tiredness
- Feeling worthless or guilty when you are not at fault
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss and weight gain
- Having sleeping difficulties or staying in bed all day
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Thinking about death or wishing to be dead
- Feeling worried or uptight
- High use of alcohol and other drugs.

Depression and suicidal thoughts

People who experience depression may have suicidal thoughts. If you or someone you know is often thinking about death or suicide it is important to access help. Speaking with a general practitioner (doctor) counsellor or family member is a good start. Depression is a major risk factor for suicide. A young person may feel so overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that the future may become difficult to contemplate.

Get help from the start by seeking support from a professional.

How to access support

It is important to talk about any issues concerning you. Speak with a trusted family member or friend

who can support you in accessing professional help. Making an appointment with a general practitioner is a good place to begin. Treatment for depression can vary depending upon the person's needs. Most treatments for depression involve counselling. Many people who experience depression are able to recover once they receive professional help; improvements can take as little as a few weeks.

Important points to remember

- Recovering from depression can take time; remember to maintain a healthy lifestyle such as eating well, exercising, and regularly speaking about your feelings which can help to lift your mood
- Depression in young people is common and it can be difficult to distinguish symptoms from normal adolescent stresses
- Professional help from a general practitioner or counselling service should be sought as soon as possible if symptoms of depression are detected
- Immediate professional support should be obtained from a general practitioner if a young person speaks of suicide
- Most people are able to recover from depression when receiving professional support

