

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

Help And Assistance

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For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

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Coping *with* DEPRESSION



COPING WITH DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND STRESS
Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

Coping *with* DEPRESSION

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Depression is a medical word used to describe low mood that last for more than a few weeks. Around the world, it is estimated that around 1 to 3% of those aged 10 to 19 will experience depression. New feelings of depression can seem to appear out of nowhere, and the rapid change in your mood can feel quite scary. When you feel down, you may not feel like going to school or seeing your friends. But when you stop socialising, it can make you feel even worse.

Luckily, there are lots of ways you can improve the symptoms of depression. If needed, professionals can also help you to understand and work through your feelings. In this article we will look in more detail about what depression is, and how to cope with it.

What is Depression?

If you have depression, feeling low or sad may be a familiar experience. Some people feel that their mood is heavy, dark or black. But depression causes a wide range of feelings in different people.

The Symptoms of Depression

Depression is not only a feeling of sadness. Some people with depression find that they are more tearful than usual, or feel angrier than normal. It can make it harder to fall asleep, or mean that you wake up in the middle of the night or early in the morning. At school or college you may struggle to concentrate.

Depression can also be associated with feelings of hopelessness or despair, or feelings that you are not good enough. It is no wonder that some people compare being depressed to living under a big black cloud.



What Causes Depression?

Depression can be related to your personality, as well as genetics or your family history. The rates of depression also increase as you get older or if you develop a physical illness.

Sometimes, depression has a clear cause. It might follow an accident, a traumatic event, the death of a relative, friend or pet, being bullied or falling out with your best friend. Often, it is not one event that leads to depression, but a series of 'triggers' or stressful events that occur over time.

Although depression might sometimes follow a stressful or upsetting event, in many cases, there is no clear cause for the illness. You do not need to have been through something that you view as stressful or upsetting to feel depressed. The condition can seem to occur out of the blue.

The symptoms of depression, regardless of whether there is a clear cause or not, have been linked to changes in the natural chemicals found within the brain. The altered levels of hormones such as dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin can all affect the symptoms of depression that a person experiences.

It is common for those with depression to also suffer from anxiety. Anxiety is similar to fear, and it can reduce how confident you feel about going to school or socialising with friends. If you have both anxiety and depression, a vicious cycle of avoiding social situations, becoming isolated, and then feeling that your mood is even lower, can occur. It is important to get help in breaking this cycle, so that you can start to find enjoyment in life again.



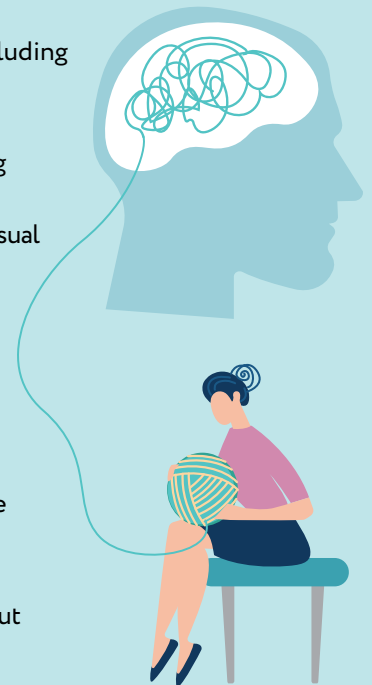
How Do I Recognise Depression?

Both adults, teenagers and children can experience depression. The most well-known symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or having a low mood that won't go away
- Feeling irritable or grumpy, often for no reason
- Not wanting to do any of the things you used to enjoy, such as clubs, activities, seeing friends, gaming or reading
- Feeling tired or exhausted no matter how much sleep you get.

Some teenagers might have additional symptoms of depression including:

- Not being able to concentrate on activities including school work, TV programmes or conversations
- Finding it hard to make decisions
- Not being able to relax, or the opposite, feeling that you have no energy to do anything
- Having trouble sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- Not wanting to spend time with friends or family
- Eating more or less than usual
- Gaining or losing weight
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling that you are worthless
- Thoughts that there is nothing good in your life
- Feeling numb or as if you don't have any emotions any more
- Having thoughts about hurting yourself, or about suicide.



Sometimes, depression can cause physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches, too.

If anxiety occurs with depression, it may make you feel nervous, stressed or panicky. You may have a sense of dread, or physical symptoms such as dizziness, feeling sick or shaky. The symptoms that occur with depression can make some teenagers think about trying alcohol or drugs to try to cope with how they feel. However, both of these substances are addictive and won't help you to feel better.

What Can I Do to Cope with Depression?



It can feel like depression is taking over your life. Many teenagers with depression feel like they are alone, but there are places that you can turn to get help with how you are feeling.

Keep Talking

Although you might feel like pulling away from your friends and family, socialising can help you to feel better. Keep in touch with your friends, even if just by text, and try to spend time with family or friends. Something as simple as watching TV with a sibling in the evening can be helpful.

Talk to a friend, sibling, parent, or another trusted adult (like a teacher or sports coach) about how you are feeling. Depression is common and is now better understood than it used to be. Sharing your worries, concerns or feelings with someone else can help to lift some of the heaviness you might be feeling. If it feels too difficult to talk out loud or in person, send a text, email or letter explaining how you feel.

Once you have shared your worries with someone else, you may benefit from their support in starting to manage and improve how you feel.

Stay Active

You might not feel like it, but becoming active can really help your mood. Even if you have never felt sporty, it's not too late to start. Even people who are retired and have never been active can take up a new form of exercise!

If you've always hated PE and the thought of exercise, do something as simple as going for a five minute walk after school. Phone a friend while you're out, or pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. Research has shown that getting outside can help your mental health. If the walk helps, build on this in the next few days or weeks by going for a short scoot, cycle, jog, or a swim in the local pool.

Maintain Your Routine

It can be tempting to withdraw from your usual activities when your mood is low. But by carrying on with school, clubs and social events, you can keep up with your hobbies, schoolwork and friendships. These activities are not only a good distraction, but they can also help to improve the way you feel overall.

When you feel down, it can make it harder to keep a healthy sleep pattern. Try to keep to your normal bedtime and wake up time, as becoming tired or losing your sleep routine can make you feel worse.

Eat Well

Depression can lead you to eat more or less than usual, and this can cause weight gain or loss. Eating three healthy or balanced meals each day will help to keep your weight steady, as well as giving you the right amount of energy to focus on schoolwork and other activities.

Start a Journal

Keeping a journal is a good way to express your feelings and start to work through them. If you don't feel like writing much, jot down a few bullet points each day about how you are feeling. If you're feeling creative, draw a picture to express yourself instead.

Seek Professional Help

Sometimes, despite trying all of the above, a low mood can remain. Some people may feel so low that they don't feel able to try any of the tips above. In either case, it is very important that you seek help from an expert.

There are several professionals who can listen to how you are feeling and offer advice. You could book an appointment with your GP, or find out if your school has a counsellor who you can see. If neither of these options appeal, phone helplines exist including Childline, Pieta House and The Samaritans.

Consider Medications or Therapies

If you seek professional help, you may be offered anti-depressants, counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help treat the symptoms of depression. Although in the past anti-depressants were sometimes viewed negatively, many people who need them find them to be a helpful way to lift the symptoms of depression.



Know How to Manage an Emergency

Depression can sometimes make you feel so low that you think about hurting yourself or even have thoughts about suicide. If this occurs, or if you have already caused harm to yourself, you must request urgent medical assistance.

If you require urgent or immediate care, or are concerned for your safety (or the safety of someone else), you must visit your GP, hospital or out of hours clinic straight away. In an emergency, call 999 to request an ambulance or Gardaí.

I have a friend who might be depressed. What can I do to help them?

If reading the symptoms of depression makes you wonder if your friend might be depressed, it is reassuring to know that there are plenty of ways that you can help them.

Depression is experienced differently by each person, but your friend may find it helpful if you:



- Start a conversation about how they are feeling. They may not feel confident enough to begin talking, but if you ask the question, it can make it easier for them to open up. You could start with:
 - “You’ve seemed a bit down lately. Is there anything that you want to talk about?”
 - “It seems like you’ve been having a hard time, can I help with anything?”
- Offer to help them find support, such as a friendly teacher, a counsellor, or help them to book a GP appointment.
- Encourage them to keep socialising, to carry on with any therapy, or to keep taking any medicines that a doctor prescribes.
- Learn about depression in books or online. The more you understand about it, the more effectively you will be able to understand and support your friend.
- Keep inviting them to events. Even if your friend has started to withdraw from social events, one day they may feel up to joining you again, and this will help to prevent isolation.
- Remain patient – it will take time for depression to start to improve.
- Text or call every now and again to check how they are. This shows them that you care, and may stop them from feeling so alone.

It is important that you look after your own health as well. It is not your job to fix or mend your friend, and you are not alone. It can be hard to support a friend with depression, so make sure you reach out to other friends or your parents if it starts to feel too much.

I think my child might be depressed, what are the signs?

Sometimes it is clear that your child has low mood or depression. In other cases, it might be difficult to work out if the symptoms can be attributed to ‘normal’ teenage behaviour or the start of depression.

Occasional bad moods and irritability are normal during the teenage years, but depression can cause overwhelming sadness, anger or withdrawal from friends and family. Even the activities that they used to love may no longer appeal, and it may seem that their personality has been stripped away.

If you notice persistent sadness, negativity, tearfulness, anger, irritability or hopelessness, depression could be the cause.

What should I do if my child is depressed?

Ignoring depression in the hope that it may resolve on its own is unlikely to be helpful. If you suspect that your child is depressed, take steps to help and support them straight away. Even if depression isn’t the cause, the behavioural signs that you have noticed may need addressing anyway.

Open up a conversation with your teenager in a non-judgmental and loving way. Mention the symptoms that are concerning you, and see if your child can explain how they are feeling. Listen, without interrupting, to what they tell you. Ensure that your child knows that they have your support no matter what they say.

If they refuse to talk, don’t give up. Instead, emphasise your concern in a gentle manner and reopen the conversation again in a few days. If they won’t talk, trust your instinct, and speak to a professional about your concerns. This might involve making an appointment with their teacher, or taking advice from a counsellor or GP.



Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

FreeText HELP to 50015

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 www.ineedhelp.ie

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About Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



We run our “Four Steps to Help” Programme for schools and colleges around Ireland which provides Zoom workshops. We also have a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at schools.yspi.ie/video.php We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a 24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service.

Full details are available at www.yspi.ie

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