

Low Mood and Depression

Overview description

Depression is described as a low mood that lasts for at least two weeks and impacts on a young person's behaviour and has physical, cognitive and emotional effects. It interferes with the ability to learn, work and to have healthy relationships (YMHFA, 2017).

It is normal to feel low at times, but someone is said to be suffering from depression when these feelings do not disappear quickly or they begin to interfere with their everyday life.

People describe depression in different ways such as '*being under a dark cloud*' or '*feeling like drowning - no matter how hard you try to fight back*'.

Milder forms of depression can cause an individual to feel in low spirits but it may not impede on their normal life. However, it can make everything feel like it requires more effort or is less worthwhile.

Severe depression can cause an individual's life to become very challenging to manage. It can impact on the relationships they have with their family and friends. It is likely to interfere with their education and social life. For some people it can be so severe that they are not motivated to do anything. Severe depression increases the risk of self-harm, substance misuse and suicide. Depression is one of the most common types of mental illness, with 20% people having depression at some point in their lives. It is common for depression to develop alongside anxiety and depression can be recurrent.

Educational settings have a significant role in the prevention and identification of mental health needs such as depression. Early identification is key to an individual overcoming mental illness and their associated later outcomes such as substance misuse and suicidal tendencies (Davey & McGorry; 2019; Fergusson et.al.; 2005).

Signs to look out for:

Depression affects different people in different ways. Warning signs can include:

- A decline in academic achievement
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviour such as truanting, drinking alcohol, experimenting in drugs and criminal behaviour
- Decreased attendance or arriving late at the education setting
- Not wanting to do things that they have previously enjoyed- for example attendance at clubs, enjoying hobbies
- Avoiding friends or social situations so they may often be on their own
- Weight gain or loss
- Being irritable, upset, miserable or lonely
- Being self-critical
- Expressing that they want to self-harm or evidence of self-harm
- Looking tired and having a lack of energy

It is important to remember that just because a young person is experiencing one or more of these symptoms, it doesn't mean they are definitely affected by depression. It's important to talk to them and their family to identify what support they need.

The link below is to a short clip which describes depression.

<https://mft.nhs.uk/rmch/services/camhs/young-people-2/depression/>

Risk factors

The NHS have identified that factors which increase the risk of depression in children and young people as:

- family difficulties
- bullying
- physical, emotional or [sexual abuse](#)
- a family history of depression or other mental health problems

Sometimes depression is triggered by 1 difficult event, such as parents separating, a bereavement or problems with education or other children.

Often, it's caused by a mixture of things. For example, a child may tend to get depression and also may have experienced some difficult life events.

What reduces the risk of developing depression?

It is important to outline the protective factors for low mood and depression as it links to the preventative strategies education settings can implement

- Having a relationship with a key person in school/setting
- Opportunities for engagement within school/setting and community
- Clear expectations for behaviour
- A supportive family who provide structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability
- Supportive relationships
- Exercise
- Academic achievement and meeting goals
- High self-esteem
- Ability to self-regulate emotions
- Good coping skills and problem-solving skills

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines

The NICE guidelines are evidence-based recommendations for health and care in England. It is imperative to consult the NICE guidelines (2019) when considering next steps for children and young people (CYP). The below guidelines for 5-18 year olds with low mood/mild depression *'continuing after 2 weeks of watchful waiting, and without significant comorbid problems or active suicidal ideas or plans, consider the following options adapted to developmental level as needed'*:

- digital cognitive–behavioural therapy (CBT)
- group CBT
- group non-directive supportive therapy (NDST)
- group interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT).

If these options would not meet the child's clinical needs or are unsuitable for their circumstances, consider the following adapted to developmental level as needed:

- attachment-based family therapy
- individual CBT.

The NICE guidelines stipulate that CYP presenting with moderate to severe depression should be reviewed by a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team. It would be important to communicate with the individual's practitioner as they can provide useful advice on supporting CYP following their assessments in conjunction with the interventions and approaches within this chapter and earlier mental health chapter.

Please refer to the Thrive in Education & Mental Health services in information outlined in the mental health chapter.

Evidence-base

There are many measures which have been proved to improve mood and mental health. It is important to look at each case individually and work collaboratively with the child, their parents or carers and other professionals to identify the best way to support the CYP in overcoming low mood or depression. Where you think there is an immediate risk of harm or even life immediate support should be sought.

Effective interventions with a strong evidence base include both approaches to support positive mental health and approaches for those identified as having low mood or depression.

Please refer to the 'approaches to support positive mental health' outlined in the mental health chapter.

Approaches for CYP identified as having low mood

Talking therapies

Talking therapies are treatments which involve the CYP talking to a trained professional about their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. There are many different types of talking therapy, but they all aim to provide the individual with:

- a safe time and place to talk to someone
- help to make sense of things and understand themselves better
- help to resolve complicated feelings, or find ways to live with them
- help to recognise unhelpful patterns in the way they think or act, and find ways to change them (if they want to).

CBT is a talking treatment which focuses on how an individual's thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect their feelings and behaviour. It teaches them coping skills for dealing with specific elements of their problems linked to their low mood. It combines cognitive therapy (examining the things you think) and behaviour therapy (examining the things you do).

TiE recommends against education staff delivering CBT interventions as it is important that professionals delivering these interventions receive regular supervision from a psychologist.

Medication

Medication prescribed by a GP can be effectively used to treat the biological causes of depression and can help to prevent harm in the first instance and allow the CYP to better access therapeutic support. Antidepressants can treat the symptoms of depression but they don't always deal with the causes. Doctors will often prescribe them alongside a talking therapy, to help deal with the causes of mental health problems. The NICE guidelines (2019) recommend that for CYP with mild depression medication should not be used in the first instance and that it should only be used in conjunction with the receipt of 'concurrent psychological therapy'.

Top
Tips!

For Early
Years

Children in the early years require support and activities to promote a strong sense of self and to harness their self-esteem.

The following links give some useful activities and ideas for identifying and supporting children displaying behaviours related to low mood and to boost their sense of self:

<https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/personal-social-and-emotional-development/sense-of-self>

<https://www.annafreud.org/early-years/early-years-in-mind/common-difficulties/withdrawn-behaviour/>

Post-16

Top Tips!

Young people will often experience times of low mood: since Covid-19 research suggests that there has been an increase in reports of low mood and depression in young people at college, apprentices or post-16 settings.

- Having a sense of belonging and feeling supported by adults and friends will help to reduce student's low mood. Considering how to help the student to make friends and have a support network during a transition and throughout their time within a provision will be important.
- Encourage students to take part in Mental Health Awareness Month: consider how the student council or a group of young people in your provision can work together to promote good mental health practices to support low mood and depression.
- Young people need to learn what triggers their low mood and how to use strategies that help them to manage and cope with their anxiety independently so that they feel confident to use them in the community, workplaces or further education. How can staff support students to understand their low mood and be pro-active to use helpful and healthy strategies?
- Exam or coursework stress is a normal part of completing studies: how can staff help to normalise this stress and support students be to manage and cope with this stress in a healthy way?
- Having good daily mental health and self-care practices will support all students: how does their curriculum or programme promote good sleep, a healthy diet and exercise?

Useful Resources

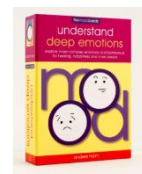
Video 'Annabel's story'

A short video clip from CAMHS which may be useful for staff working with students with depression and young people themselves. <https://camhs.elft.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression--Low-mood>



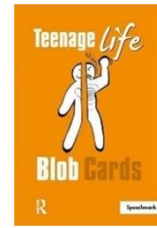
Mood cards (understanding deep emotions)

These cards are great for exploring moods, emotions and behaviours in a non-judgemental way.



Blob cards (Pip Wilson) <https://www.pipwilson.com/p/blob-tree.html>

Blob cards and books enables you to explore a wide range of feelings and emotions. The accompanying activity cards suggest several different ways of using the cards with individuals or groups to initiate discussion and reflection around emotions.

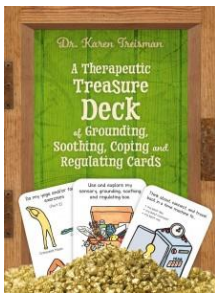


Train your dragon to love himself (Steve Herman)



This book, aimed at primary school-aged children, which gives children positive affirmations and acceptance and love around who they are.

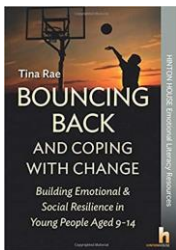
Dr Karen Treisman resources (Amazon)



Dr Karen Treisman's resources are therapeutic and aimed at a wide range of ages. The cards pictured and linked are great as they offer a non-threatening way to explore feelings, and to form effective coping, regulating, soothing, and grounding strategies. Designed to work with both the brain and body, the cards address a wide range of common issues including anxiety, stress, low mood, sleep difficulties and emotional dysregulation. They employ strategies including cognitive techniques, nurturing activities, sensory strategies, body-based activity and creative exercises.

Tina Rae resources and books

<https://www.hintonpublishers.com/catalogsearch/result/?q=tina+rae>

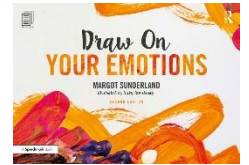
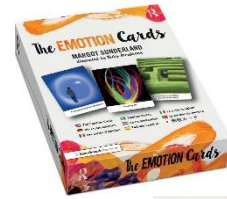


Practical evidence-based strategies to teach young people in the face of adversity. These strategies, drawn from evidence-based approaches such as mindfulness and CBT, will help them to build the ability to bounce back when things go wrong. These 20 clearly presented sessions will help build self-esteem, empathy & assertiveness, develop stress management and problem-solving skills and a reflective approach. Flexible and ideal for use with individuals or groups.

Margot Sunderland resources and books

<https://www.margotsunderland.org/buy-resouces>

The cards are designed to capture the deeper truth of how people experience their life. The relief of having found an image that accurately conveys your familiar mental states, can be profound.



Useful links

<https://camhs.elft.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression--Low-mood>

<https://thedepressionproject.com/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/depression/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health>

<https://www.manchestermind.org/>

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/youth/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/about-depression/>

<https://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/directory-of-services/search/depression/blank/>

References

Davey, C. G., & McGorry, P. D. (2019). Early intervention for depression in young people: a blind spot in mental health care. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 6(3), 267-272.

Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J., Ridder, E. M., & Beautrais, A. L. (2005). Subthreshold depression in adolescence and mental health outcomes in adulthood. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 62(1), 66-72.

Schleider, J., & Weisz, J. (2018). A single-session growth mindset intervention for adolescent anxiety and depression: 9-month outcomes of a randomized trial. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 59(2), 160-170.

Wolpert, M., Harris, R., Hodges, S., Fuggle, P., James, R., Wiener, A., ...Munk, S. (2019). THRIVE Framework for system change. London: CAMHS Press

<https://freshstartineducation.co.uk/resilience/> (Dr Tina Rae)

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/youth/>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng134/chapter/Recommendations>

<https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/> (Dr Carol Dweck)