

Depression

Depression is more than just feeling sad or down – it's a serious condition that affects children and young people's mood, behaviour and thoughts about themselves and the world.

What is depression?

We all feel sad, moody or low sometimes, it's a normal part of life. However, if these feelings persist and are impacting on the person's life, it might be a sign the person is experiencing depression.

A diagnosis of depression is made, by a professional, only when the:

- depressed mood has lasted more than two weeks
- behaviour is seen in more than one situation (for example, at home and at school)
- symptoms are severe enough to limit the child or young person's ability to cope with everyday life.

Learn more about the [different types of depression](#).

There's no single cause of depression

Many factors may come into play, such as:

- life events (for example, a death in the family or family separation)
- biological factors (for example, genetics)
- learning community-based factors (for example, peer group difficulties, especially [bullying](#))
- psychological factors (for example, a tendency to think 'negatively').

Be You Resources

Find out more about how you can [support children and young people experiencing depression](#).

How does depression affect children and young people?

As well as impacting other areas of life, depression can make it hard for children and young people to learn. Without professional support, this can have long-term impacts on their learning.

Sometimes older children or young people experiencing depression may talk about wanting to die or harm themselves. This can be alarming, and it's important to take this seriously. Whether this represents a clear intention of suicide or is a way of expressing feelings of depression, it indicates a high level of distress that requires attention.

Depression can significantly impact the lives of children and young people. But getting the right type of help – and getting it early – can make a huge difference to their mental health.

Be You Resources

Learn more about [Suicide prevention and response](#).

Learn more about [Self harm](#).

What signs should I look out for?

Depression is common but can often be missed in children and young people.

In children and young people, symptoms of depression can sometimes look more like irritability, sleep changes, loss of appetite or changes in weight.

However, as adolescence can be a time of emotional turbulence, sometimes symptoms of depression can be missed.

Children and young people are often unable to explain how they're feeling, especially when depressed.

Signs of depression

A child or young person who is depressed may:

- be irritable, easily annoyed or upset
- seem sad and cry easily
- be harder to engage and motivate
- have difficulty concentrating in class and completing their work
- seem withdrawn and have difficulty relating to peers and educators
- have low energy
- lose interest in activities they usually enjoy
- have difficulty making decisions
- make a lot of negative comments about themselves
- look for what's wrong rather than see the positives in situations
- have trouble sleeping or want to sleep most of the day
- experience changes in weight (including both weight loss and gain)
- withdraw from peer group activities or social situations.

Depression can be difficult to spot because it presents in many ways. Looking beyond behaviour to try to identify what might be underneath can help you respond with understanding and empathy. The important point is to notice if there's a concern and seek further advice and assistance.

You can use the [Be You BETLS Observation Tool](#), a template for gathering and documenting information and observations, to keep a record of your observations and to support conversations.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about observing children and young people's behavioural and mood changes in the [Notice](#) module.

External links

Beyond Blue – [The facts: depression / Types of depression](#)

Emerging Minds – [The role of depression literacy and stigma in how parents perceive and respond to adolescent depressive symptoms: Lessons for childhood mental health](#)

Orygen – [Depression and young people](#)

ReachOut – [8 facts about depression](#)

Bibliography

Visit [Depression](#) to get a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

