

What is Depression?

Depression is a **common experience** for people of **all ages** & can make someone feel down, bored, numb, sad & disinterested in life. Like all mental health experiences, depression can be seen on a scale with 'not depressed' at one end & depression which can be diagnosed by a mental health professional at the other end. In between are all kinds of experiences of being down such as feeling a bit blue or feeling really miserable because something has happened.

For Depression to be diagnosed, a person's experience of depression needs to have been going on for **more than two weeks**, be causing some of the things listed in the following page & be making everyday living a challenge.

What Causes Depression?

While no-one knows exactly what causes depression, a number of factors are thought to be involved. It may develop from a combination of **stressful events** and pressures, **chemical** or **hormonal changes** in the body, and **genes** inherited from our parents.

How is depression different in children & young people than adults?

A young person's depression may be **more difficult to recognise** because:

- Children & young people do not always understand their feelings or express them clearly
- Indicators of depression can be dismissed as "just growing up" or as adolescent moodiness
- There is a strong tie between "getting into trouble" & feeling depressed & it can be difficult to work out if the young person is depressed because of being in trouble or in trouble because of being depressed

Changes in Feelings

Low mood/sad/crying easily
Feeling guilty, worthless,
irritable &/or anxious
Feeling uninterested in things
that are usually enjoyable
Feeling really bored

Behaviour Changes

Not getting on as well with
friends
Finding practical looking after
ourselves hard e.g., eating,
sleeping, keeping ourselves &
where we live clean & tidy to
care for self
Not going to school
Increase in use of alcohol or
drugs

**Young people who are
experiencing
depression are
usually experiencing
some or many of the
following things:**

Changes in Thoughts

Difficulty thinking & making
decisions
Thinking that the situation is
hopeless & we are helpless
Poor concentration
Thoughts of death or suicide

Physical Changes

Change in appetite or weight
Change in sleep, e.g. waking
up during the night, finding it
hard to get to sleep, or
sleeping more than usual
Loss of energy or motivation,
feeling tired & run down

So my child/young person is Depressed – What now?

The sooner Depression is recognised & treated, the greater the chances of recovery. Sit down & **talk** with your child or young person & suggest that it might help him or her to feel better by getting some **help**. After talking, the **next step** is to visit the **Doctor** or **School Counsellor**. They may refer you & your young person for an **Assessment** at a **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service**.

The two most common ways to **treat** Depression are with **Medication, Psychotherapy** or a **combination** of both:



Psychotherapy (Talking Therapy):

There are a number of forms of Psychotherapy, most of which involve **talking** about the issues affecting the young person & then learning **strategies** to overcome them.



Antidepressant Medication:

This may be recommended to help make your young person's **mood** more **stable**. Antidepressants work by **balancing** the supply of **brain chemicals** (neurotransmitters). They take a **few weeks** to work & often need to be **taken for several months** or longer to help keep depression from returning.

All Antidepressants have some **side-effects** & these affect different people to a different extent. Side effects are most likely when medication is started & when doses are altered. Commonly, these include headache, upset tummies & anxiety, which usually pass within days. These are less likely if medication is started at a lower dose & increased slowly. Some people also experience a temporary increase in suicidal thinking (not suicidal behaviour) for a few days or weeks when they start medication, so it is important for them to be well supported & supervised during this period.



Other Treatments:

Family therapy, Counselling & Education Groups have also been found to be **helpful** in addition to the above treatments. Please make sure you **talk** with your child/young person's **doctor** about any worries or questions regarding medication or psychotherapy. Also, **find out** how you can be an **active** part of the **team** that helps your child/young person with their **recovery**.

Helpful Websites:

A number of **self-help strategies** are also available (on-line & in books) & may also be worth checking out:

www.lowdown.co.nz

www.depression.org.nz

www.mentalhealth.org.nz

www.engagenz.co.nz

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au