

# DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

**Adolescence is a time of change and it can be hard to tell the difference between 'normal teenage behaviour' and depression and anxiety. In Australia, 160,000 young people (16-24 years) live with depression and around 1 in 6 young people have anxiety.<sup>1</sup> If your son or daughter shows warning signs of these conditions, getting help early can improve their wellbeing. It can also help to stop the problems happening again when they become adults.**

### DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AMONG ADOLESCENTS

There are many myths about depression and anxiety in young people but the reality is that feeling sad, irritable or anxious most of the time is not a 'normal' part of adolescence.

Everybody feels sad or down sometimes. But depression is more than short-term sadness. It's an illness that causes persistent changes to a person's thoughts, mood, behaviour and physical health. It also affects his or her enjoyment of life.

Feeling anxious at times is also normal, for example before an exam. But an anxiety disorder is far more intense and can go on for weeks or months, affecting health and day-to-day activities. There are many types of anxiety disorder and the symptoms vary.

Many different factors can contribute to depression and anxiety in young people. When it happens, it's no one's fault. The important thing is that depression and anxiety are identified and treated early – left untreated, they can lead to underachieving at study or work, misuse of alcohol and drugs, and even an increased risk of suicide.

### WARNING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Depression doesn't just cause sadness or feeling blue, and anxiety doesn't just make people worry. Young people can express depression and anxiety in many different ways. They might:

- have trouble falling or staying asleep, or spend much of the day in bed
- be tired, grumpy, irritable, tearful or upset most of the time
- feel restless, keyed up or on edge
- lose interest in things they used to enjoy, and have trouble starting and completing assignments or work
- lose concentration and be forgetful and easily distracted
- become withdrawn and lose friends
- be worried and panicky about doing anything out of the ordinary
- either refuse to eat or eat a lot
- complain of feeling physically awful, with unexplained aches and pains, and not want to go to school

### OFFERING SUPPORT

**If your son or daughter shows some of the warning signs described on this fact sheet, you could start by trying to get them to talk about their feelings.**

Your son or daughter may find it awkward discussing their thoughts and emotions openly with you. They may get angry when you ask if they're okay. Try to stay calm, be firm, fair and consistent and don't lose control. If you are wrong about something, admit it.

'Active listening' will help you to understand how your teenager feels. Some tips for this are to maintain eye contact, sit in a relaxed position and ask open-ended questions that can't be answered with just 'yes' or 'no' (e.g. "So tell me about...?"). Save your suggestions or advice for later and instead, offer neutral comments that acknowledge their feelings.

*Talk to a counsellor (in person, on the phone or online) to learn more about active listening. Your State Parentline service can also help (see numbers overleaf).*

Visit: [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Info line: **1300 22 4636** Email: [infoline@beyondblue.org.au](mailto:infoline@beyondblue.org.au)

*beyondblue: the national depression initiative*



## WHAT NEXT?

As well as offering your support and showing that you understand and care, it's a good idea to encourage your son or daughter to eat healthily, be active, and get enough sleep. He or she may also need to see a doctor or counsellor. Teenagers who resist seeing someone may prefer to ring Lifeline or Kids Help Line (see numbers below), as this is anonymous and can be less confronting. They might also like to try an online self-help program such as MoodGYM or e-couch (see details below).

It's a good idea to learn as much as you can about your son or daughter's condition. This may help you to understand why they behave in the way that they do – so you can separate the illness from the person and realise that your teenager's moods or behaviour may not be directed at you personally.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

Encouraging your son or daughter to see a General Practitioner (GP) is a good start. The GP will want to talk to you about your view of the problem, but should speak to your teenager alone as well – he or she may then feel more able to open up about things like social drug use and sexual history.

Depending on their age and maturity, teenagers are entitled to confidentiality. However, the doctor or counsellor has a duty of care to inform parents if they believe a teenager's life is at risk. Your son or daughter needs to be able to form a trusting relationship with their doctor or counsellor – if they don't feel comfortable with the first person they see, help them to find someone else.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Psychological therapies are the first treatment for diagnosed depression and anxiety in young people. The GP may provide the therapy or your teenager may be given a referral to a counsellor or specialist.

Two psychological therapies have been found to be especially helpful – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT). These therapies can help people to change negative thoughts and feelings, encourage them to get involved in activities, speed recovery, prevent depression or anxiety from recurring, and identify ways to manage the illness and stay well.

In severe cases, after weighing up the pros and cons, medication may be recommended to go with the other therapies. If your teenager does start taking an antidepressant, the doctor will monitor them closely, especially during the first four weeks. For more information see *beyondblue* Fact sheet for parents – *Antidepressants for the treatment of depression in children and adolescents* at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or by calling the info line on 1300 22 4636.

Young people who have depression may be at risk of suicide, and if they are they need urgent help. Consult a doctor, the emergency department of your local hospital or a mental health professional (like a psychologist or psychiatrist).

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- When teenagers have depression or anxiety, it doesn't help to pressure them to 'snap out of it' or 'cheer up'. And you can't assume that the problem will go away without help.
- If your teenager doesn't want to talk to you about his or her problems, try not to take it personally. Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone you don't know about what's troubling you.
- Don't think of a diagnosis of depression and/or anxiety as a 'label' – it is more of a 'flag' to guide the level and type of support your son or daughter needs.
- Recovery is possible but it can be a slow process. The whole family will need to be patient and understanding.
- Praise your son or daughter for small achievements and avoid making criticisms.
- Try to reduce conflict within the family and create a calm and relaxed atmosphere at home.
- Set time aside for your own relaxation, and try to continue enjoyable family activities rather than let the problem take over everyone's lives.
- Seek support from trusted friends or relatives, or talk to a counsellor about ways to cope.



### State-based Parentline Services (counselling and support for parents)

Parentline QLD & NT	1300 30 1300	<a href="http://www.parentline.com.au">www.parentline.com.au</a>
Parentline VIC	13 22 89	<a href="http://www.parentline.vic.gov.au">www.parentline.vic.gov.au</a>
Parent Helpline SA	1300 364 100	<a href="http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au">www.parenting.sa.gov.au</a>
Parentline NSW	1300 1300 52	<a href="http://www.parentline.org.au">www.parentline.org.au</a>
Parenting WA Line	(08) 6279 1200 or 1800 654 432 (free for STD callers)	
Parentline ACT	(02) 6287 3833	<a href="http://www.parentlineact.org.au">www.parentlineact.org.au</a>
Parenting Line TAS	1300 808 178	

### MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

**Lifeline 13 11 14** (cost of a local call)  
**Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800** (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

**beyondblue** [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)  
or [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)  
info line 1300 22 4636

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

**headspace** [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)  
Information, support and help near you

**ReachOut** [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

Information and support for young people going through tough times

**National LGBT Health Alliance**

[www.lgbthealth.org.au](http://www.lgbthealth.org.au) Information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people (LGBT)

**Kids Help Line** [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

**Lifeline Service Finder**

[www.lifeline.org.au/service\\_finder](http://www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder)

Lists services that are either free of charge or low cost

**MoodGYM** [www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)

**e-couch** [www.ecouch.anu.edu.au](http://www.ecouch.anu.edu.au)

Free, interactive online self-help programs

**SOURCES** This fact sheet is based on information from: *beyondblue* (2011) *Clinical practice guidelines: Depression in adolescents and young adults*. Melbourne: *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*.

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). 2007 *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results* (4326.0) Canberra: ABS
- *beyondblue* [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com) and [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- ReachOut.com [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

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