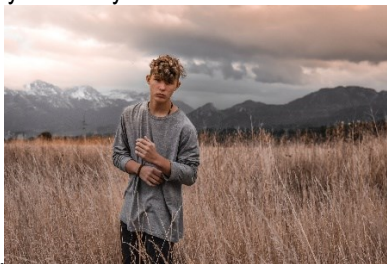


# Teenager Health

Adolescence is an exciting time of life. There is so much to do, so much to explore, so much to learn. All of this can be at times exhilarating, challenging, scary, painful or whatever. There will be successes and there will be failures. There will be times that we look back on and say, “I wish I had not done or said that” and there will be times that we look back on and say “I see that doing or saying that was the right thing to do”.

We can look at this time of life as an opportunity for emotional, social, and thinking growth and see many positives. Unfortunately, in my opinion, there is a social tendency to think about the adolescent years in negative terms. And I for one am getting a little bit tired of hearing these kinds of negative stories. Where are the positive stories? This does not mean teens do not have their struggles. Nor does it mean that the social, personal, educational challenges faced by teens are not also faced by adults! Everyone has their challenges. Part of growing through the teen years is learning how to successfully overcome life’s challenges. Woven into these joys and sorrows of adolescence is the reality that some of the most concerning illnesses arise during that time. They include such things as: Depression; Panic Disorder; Schizophrenia; etc. Drug misuse and even drug abuse are other challenges that arise. Unrecognized and untreated they can have negative impacts during teenager-hood and for adulthood to come.

The good news is, we have lots of effective and positive ways to help teens and families who are facing the challenges of mental disorders. This does not mean that the usual ups and downs of teen life will go away. This eBook0 will help you and your families learn about some of the most common medical illnesses of adolescence – mental disorders. I hope that this will help you and your family better understand what these are, how to identify



them and what you and your family can do to help.

## Why mental health is

important?

Mental health refers to the health of your brain. It is what is going on inside your head. Your mental health affects every aspect of your life, including your school performance, your physical health, your feelings, your self-

esteem, and your relationships with other people. Having good mental health makes it easier for you to cope with stress and live your life the way you want to live it. Looking after your mental health is important.

Many people experience mental health problems as teenagers. Mental health problems are when your brain is having difficulty working as well as it should. Usually, this happens when you are in a difficult situation, like if your parents are going through a divorce or someone you love dies. When this happens, you may need some extra help from a trusted adult (like a family member, a teacher, or a neighbour) or a counsellor. Sometimes, however, our brains can work differently than usual for no apparent reason, causing us problems. For example, they can make us feel sad all the time or feel anxious when there is no real danger. When this happens, it is considered a mental disorder. A mental disorder is what happens when your brain gets used to not working the way it is supposed to. We get stuck in a pattern of feeling **really down**, or **anxious**, or **really distracted**. Sometimes these patterns can even change the way our brain works. Just like how mental health affects all aspects of your life, so do mental disorders. Having a mental disorder can make it harder for you to do well in school, to get along with your friends and family, and to stay physically healthy. It makes it difficult to live your life the way you would like.

Some people with mental disorders may end up using drugs and alcohol to cope, and other people may hurt themselves or think suicide is the answer. Seek help as soon as you notice a problem. There are lots of people who can help you. Early treatment of mental disorders not only helps you right away, but the help you get can last your whole life.

A mental disorder is what happens when your brain gets used to not working the way it is supposed to.



# How

the brain works?

In order to understand how the brain changes when someone has a mental disorder, we need to know how it usually works.

The brain has 6 different but completely linked functions:

1. *Thinking*

Your brain oversees how you store and process information, whether it's figuring out a math problem, remembering to pack your lunch, concentrating during class, or planning what you are going to do this weekend.

2. *Feeling*

Your brain also controls how you feel at any given point in time and how you express those feelings to other people.

3. *Perceiving/Sensing*

Your brain is responsible for paying attention to what is going on around you. It does this by interpreting information from your senses - sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. You see with your brain, not with your eyes.

#### 4. Physical

Your brain controls how your body moves and reacts – from obvious things, like being able to move your hands, to things you do not even think about, like breathing or digesting your food.

#### 5. Behaving

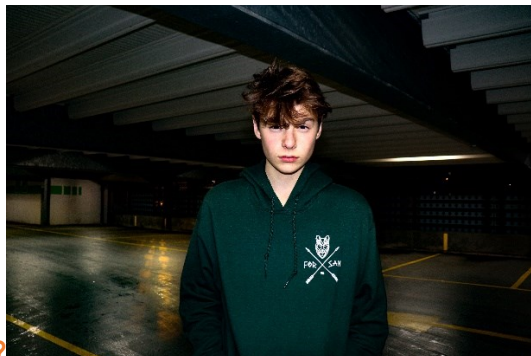
Your brain controls how you interact with the people around you and your environment. It's your brain that tells you what to do or say in different situations.

#### 6. Signalling

Your brain also plays an important role in protecting you from danger. It keeps track of the information from your senses in order to alert you that you may be in trouble, like if you touch a hot stove and you immediately pull your hand away. Your brain is what stopped you from being badly burned!

*When a person has a mental disorder, one or more of these brain functions are not working properly. And because these brain functions are all interconnected, when one function is not working properly, the other brain functions will also be affected. In the case of a mood disorder, almost all of these brain mechanisms are not working the way they should, affecting the way you think, feel, and behave. Depression is one type of mood disorder, where people feel sad almost every day and/or lose interest in many of the things they normally enjoy. It can seem like everything requires too much effort and they may even feel like life is not worth living.*

# What is Depression?



Feeling down or sad when something negative happens is a totally normal reaction. Most of the time, these feelings go away on their own or disappear when something good happens. Clinical Depression (often just called Depression) is different. Depression is a mental disorder that occurs when these feelings of sadness and other associated difficulties do not go away. In fact, they become so pervasive that they interfere with the person's ability to lead a normal and fulfilling life. Depression affects people's thoughts, feelings, actions, and even their physical activities. It becomes the filter through which the depressed person sees the world.

### Major Depressive Episode (MDE)

A Major Depressive Episode (MDE) is a period of at least two weeks where for most of the time, the person has felt sad or depressed or has not enjoyed the things he or she normally likes to do. On top of that, the person might also:

- Eat much less than normal or much more than normal
- Sleep much less than normal or much more than normal
- Move restlessly or barely move at all
- Feel really tired and lack energy

- Lose feelings of pleasure or enjoyment
- Lose interest in activities that they usually enjoy
- Feel worthless, hopeless, or guilty (without a good reason)
- Have thoughts of death and dying, including suicidal thoughts and plans
- Have trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Attempt suicide

These symptoms interfere with the person's ability to succeed in school, at work, or in relationships, and are not due to drug/alcohol use, a medical illness, or a normal period of grief after loss. People who have Depression will have at least one MDE. Some people, however, have many MDEs that come and go throughout their whole life. This is sometimes called Persistent Depressive Disorder. Persistent Depressive Disorder also includes a disorder that used to be called Dysthymic Disorder. In Dysthymic Disorder, the person feels low and depressed most of the time for at least one year (two years in adults) and has many of the symptoms of a MDE but those symptoms are not severe enough to be considered Depression.

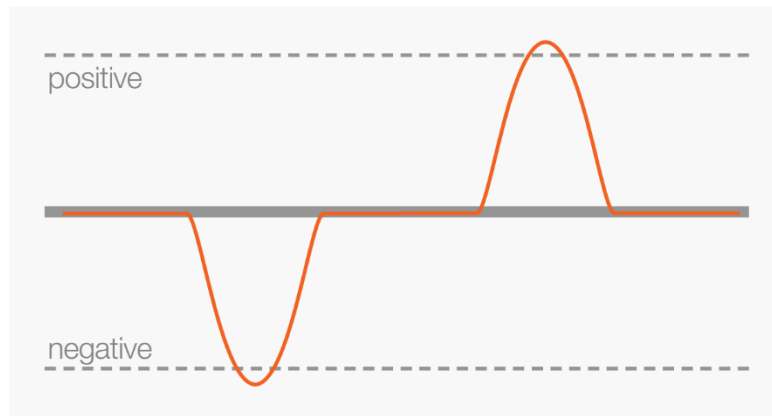
**How** do I know if I have Depression or if I am just having a bad day?

Everyone has **bad days**.

*It is perfectly normal to feel down or sad occasionally. It only becomes a problem if there seems to be no real reason for your sadness, if the sad and low feelings last longer than they should, if you experience most of the features of a MDE, and if those symptoms and feelings interfere with your daily routine. If this is happening to you, you may have Depression. It's a good idea to talk to your parents or an adult you trust and make an appointment with your school counsellor or family doctor to get help.*

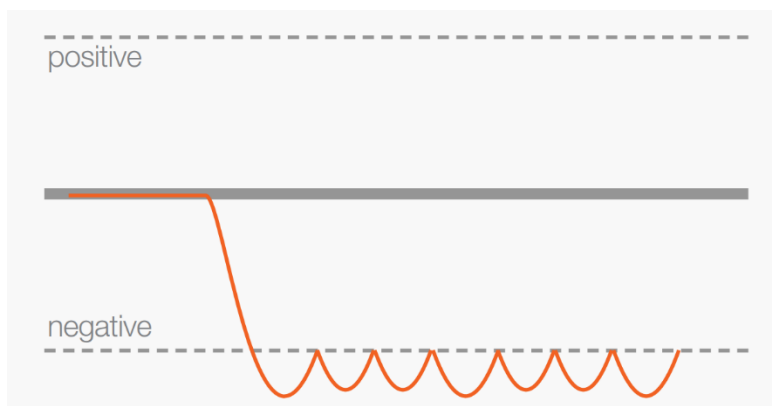
**Everyone** has bad days!

This is what a normal range of mood looks like:



Notice how mood fluctuates up and down - that is what a normal range of mood looks like for most people, moving back and forth from positive mood to low mood. These fluctuations often happen because of something positive (e.g., getting a good grade on a test) or something negative (e.g., getting a bad grade on a test). But whatever the type of mood, it does not get stuck in one position for a long time! positive negative.

For someone with Depression, his or her mood range looks like:



Notice how the mood line sways just a little up and down but always stays below the usual mood line. That is what mood looks like for people with Depression. It is stuck in the low portion of the graph.

# What do people with Depression often say?

**“I get sad and can’t feel better, even when good things happen.”**

**“I feel sluggish and can’t get anything done.”**

**“I feel worthless.”**

**“I sleep a lot.”**

**“I don’t feel good about my life.”**

**“I get headaches and can’t concentrate.”**

**“I feel hopeless.”**

**“I get cranky and tired.”**

**“Things that usually make me happy don’t anymore.”**

**“I get headaches and can’t concentrate.”**

**“I think about committing suicide.”**

**“I lost interest in the things I used to love to do.”**

**“My grades are slipping.”**

# What causes Depression?

Although research has found many potential causes for Depression, some cases of Depression may not fit the information above. There is still a lot that we need to learn.

## *Genetics:*

Depression tends to run in families. So, if someone in your immediate family (parent or brother/sister) has Depression, you are more likely to develop Depression than someone without Depression in his or her family.

## *Trauma and Stress:*

Experiencing major stressors (e.g., relationship breakup, job loss) or significant trauma (e.g., death of a loved one, abuse, or neglect; especially as a child) can trigger Depression in certain people. Research has found that the impact of stressors may depend on your genetics, as some people’s genetics make them more vulnerable to stress than others.

## *Illness:*

Certain medical conditions and medications can sometimes lead to Depression.

# Who gets Depression?

Depression is not related to your ethnic background, your level of education, how much money you (or your family) make, or your relationship status. It does seem to be related to gender as Depression is twice as common in girls as guys. We do not know exactly why this is, but it could be due to differences in our biology (e.g., different genes or different hormones), differences in how society treats males and females, or due to other factors entirely. Approximately 6.2% of Australians aged 16 to 85 have experienced an affective disorder in the last 12 months. (Statistics Beyond blue 2022).

# How is Depression treated?

Depression is **very treatable**. Well-established treatments include some types of psychotherapies, as well as some kinds of medicines. Often a psychotherapy and medication will be prescribed together.

## *Psychotherapy:*

Psychotherapies work by helping your brain control your mood better. There are two different types of psychotherapy that have been found to be effective for treating Depression in teenagers – Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT). These therapies can be done one-on-one (just you and the therapist) or in a group (with other teenagers who also have Depression) and may have a family component (to help your parents and siblings understand Depression and learn how they can help).

## *Medication:*

Medication can help your brain function better. There are several different medications that your doctor might choose to prescribe. Medicines known as Serotonin Specific Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are the most commonly used.

## *What else can help:*

Having a good support network of friends and family.

**Following the Mental Wellness tips on this page!**

# having a good support system

For someone with Depression, having a good support system of trusted people is essential.

## A good support system will:

- ✚ understand the challenges that having a mental disorder creates for you
- ✚ notice when you are not acting/feeling like yourself
- ✚ be there for you when you need them
- ✚ help you cope when you are having a rough time
- ✚ hang out with you.
- ✚ listen to you when you need someone to talk to

- ✚ give you honest and helpful advice when you need it
- ✚ encourage you and help you get out and be active
- ✚ remind you that you are not alone

# tips

to help increase overall mental health:

Structure your day.

Give yourself something to do, even if you start small. Having some structure in your day can make a big difference in how you feel. Start with basic daily activities like showering, walking the dog, or making lunch. Keeping a daily diary or schedule can be a big help in keeping your mood stable and preventing you from feeling overwhelmed, especially if you're a visual person. Check out teen mental health. **Take charge of your mental health** a daily dairy that can help you get started. This is available on our website.

## **Exercise.**

Daily physical activity improves your health and mood, and helps you get rid of stress.

## **Sleep.**

Getting 8-9 hours of sleep each 3 nights will help you feel better the next day.

## **Eat healthy.**

Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to help combat stress. Try not to skip meals and go easy on the junk food.

## **Stay away from alcohol and drugs.**

Although you may feel better in the short-term, alcohol and drugs will not solve your problems. They will only give you a false sense of confidence and may make your problems worse in the long run.

## **Limit caffeine.**

Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.

## **Daily relaxation time.**

Take time each day to relax, using techniques like Box Breathing or Hand Relaxation (see page 22).

## **Go outside.**

Staying inside all the time can be really draining. Getting outside and enjoying the sun and fresh air can help you feel better.

## **Build**

healthy relationships. It's important to have a good support network of people you trust.

## **Talk.**

Talk to the people in your support network about your feelings and concerns. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your chest.



### **Stop thinking so much.**

Thinking about something over and over can make you feel worse. Try not to let yourself replay negative thoughts and situations in your mind. Distract yourself, if necessary!

### **Be realistic.**

Depression can make you interpret things as more negative than they actually are. Remind yourself that Depression skews your perspective and things may not be as bad as they seem.

*If these tips don't help, do NOT get discouraged. Just like learning to play the piano or driving a car, some of these skills require practice and patience. For more help, talk to your school counsellor or visit your family doctor. Your family doctor will be able to help you find the treatment that works best for you and can recommend places for you to go if you need more help.*

### **Box breathing**

Box Breathing can help your heart rate return to normal, which helps you to relax.

# Here

is how you do it:

If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

Step 1: Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.

Step 2: Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.

Step 3: Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.

Step 4: Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again. Repeat this process as many times as you can. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

### **Hand Relaxation**

Hand Relaxation helps to get rid of the tense feelings in your body.

# Here's

how you do it:

Clench the muscles in your left hand (make a fist) really tightly for 5 seconds. Then, let go gradually (for about 15

seconds), breathing slowly and concentrating on the feeling in your hand. Then, repeat using your right hand.

With practice, you can get really good at doing Box Breathing or Hand Relaxation techniques. You can do them just about anywhere, without anyone else knowing - on the bus, in class, even when you are hanging out with your friends.

# Stigma

Dealing

with



*If you have Depression, you may overhear insensitive comments about you and feel like you are being judged by other people. Remember that these people don't understand what Depression is. Although it may be hard, try not to take their comments personally. They do not realize that Depression is a medical condition that requires treatment, just like cancer or high blood pressure. Having Depression does not make you weak and does not make you less of a person than anyone else.*

## What is Stigma?

Stigma is a “polite” word for discrimination. It’s a negative attitude people have about something they don’t understand that can result in physical, mental, and emotional harm. When someone has a stigmatizing attitude, it means there is something wrong with their attitude- not with you. People make hurtful and judgmental comments and assumptions about people suffering from mental illness because they don’t understand that mental disorders are just another kind of medical disorder. You wouldn’t expect someone in a wheelchair to be able to climb stairs just because someone said, “snap out of it!” This is just as true for mental disorders, like Depression.

# The best way to fight stigma is

to help people better understand mental disorders.

## Helping someone **cop**ing with Depression

If someone you care about has Depression, the best and most important thing you can do is support them. In order to support someone else, you also need to look after yourself.

Here are some important points:

### **Educate yourself**

Understanding what Depression is and how it affects the person you care about will help you to be a less frustrated and more supportive friend.

### **Encourage your friend to seek help**

Having a friend, he/she can trust, like you, is so important. But someone trying to cope with a mental disorder also needs treatment. Encourage your friend to see a doctor or school counsellor to get the help he/she needs. Even if the problems don't seem that bad yet, seeking help early can prevent problems from getting worse.

### **Listen**

When you listen to and acknowledge your friend's feelings, it sends your friend the message that you care. Knowing that you have people who care about you is an important part of recovering from a mental disorder.

### **Be patient**

Sometimes it can be frustrating when your friend doesn't seem to want to hang out or do anything they used to like to do. Take a deep breath and remember that Depression is making your friend feel this way. He/she can't just "snap out of it." Getting impatient will only make the situation worse. Stay positive and be patient.

### **Don't blame yourself**

It is not your fault that your friend has Depression. Many different factors, including his/her genetic background, environment, and life experiences are involved. No one can "make" another person have Depression.

### **Don't try to change your friend**

You don't have to solve all of your friend's problems or turn him/her into a different kind of person. Just be present and supportive.

### **Be aware of suicide risk**

If your friend talks about death or suicide, don't ignore it or keep it a secret. Talk to a responsible adult whom your friend also trusts (e.g., parent, teacher, coach, counsellor). Let your friend know that you care about him/her and his/her life. If your friend is talking about suicide, you must take it seriously.

## **Be positive**

Positive moods can be contagious! It's really easy for someone with a mental disorder to focus only on the negative aspects of his/her life. Sharing your positive mood may help your friend see things from a different perspective.

## **Put yourself first**

On an airplane, they tell you to always put your oxygen mask on first in an emergency before you assist someone else. You'll be no help to anyone if you're passed out. The same goes for helping your friend. If you burn yourself out by always putting him or her first, you won't be able to help anyone. It's absolutely okay (and so important) to take time away to take care of yourself.

## **Have fun together.**

Your friend needs someone who can have fun, relax, and laugh with him/her. These are all important parts of your friend's mental health (and yours!).

# Help

*These are places you can find more information about Depression and get help:*

### Family Doctor

Talk to your family doctor about your concerns. Your doctor can help you decide on the best treatment plan for you and refer you to a good psychologist, counsellor, and/ or support group.

### Internet

The Internet has loads of information about mental illness; just know that not all of it is accurate. In fact, the information on some websites is more wrong than right.

### Phonebook

The yellow pages have lists of local support groups, counsellors, and youth health centres, some of which may be helpful for you.

### School Counsellor or Nurse

Your school counsellor or nurse may have helpful resources for you, including books, pamphlets, and contacts in the community.

### Kids help phone

The Headspace has counsellors who answer phone calls and online questions from young people 24/7. Our website has a free chat. You can reach at <https://www.lifeline.org.au> or free number 13 11 14. Many communities have a health board with information on different support groups and other resources. They are often located in community centres, malls, and grocery stores.

### Library

Check your local community or school library for books to help you understand more about Depression and how to cope.

### Emergency

If you are feeling suicidal or are in crisis, go to your local hospital's emergency room immediately

**Don't believe everything you think!!!**