DEPRESSION

Up to 24 per cent of teenagers suffer a major depressive illness but it is often not recognised.

Depression can be treated. It is common for young people to have mood changes and feel low sometimes. However if the feeling of gloom doesn’t go away life can seem hopeless. This is a sign of depression. If a young person is sad and withdrawn a great deal, or if it lasts for more than two weeks then it maybe that a young person needs help.

YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK*

Depression can affect anyone, but some teenagers are more likely to become depressed if:

- They have a close relative who has suffered from depression.
- They have had a major life stress or several stresses such as: family break-up, school failure, experience of prejudice and social isolation because of sexual preferences, child abuse, loss of a parent, accident, broken relationship or moving to another area.

*The above advice come from Depression – teenagers fact sheet Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

Following are some signs of depression in young person. If these signs persist then depression maybe the cause:

- Anxious, sad, apathetic or bored
- Restless or listless
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Withdrawal, spending excess time alone or pushing people away
- Increased anger or irritability
- Low energy, continually tired
- Low self-worth and poor concentration
- Increased use of alcohol or other drug misuse

HOW TO HELP

Young people need the love and attention of their parents as well as their own emotional space. Spend some time with your young person at least once a week doing something that you both enjoy. If you are concerned that your young person maybe experiencing difficulty then communicate your desire to help.

Here are some ideas:

- Ask what is going well and not so well at the moment.
- Accept how they feel.
- Listen to what they have to say without necessarily giving answers.
- Reassure them that people feel down at times and that mood swings are normal, but it is not normal to feel bad all the time. Let them know that help is available.
- Let them know you want to help and offer your unconditional love and support.
- Encourage them to do activities that they enjoy.
- Identify other people who they can talk to, including family, teachers and community members.
- If your young person refuses to go for help and you are worried, go by yourself first and get some advice on how to best handle the situation.
- Taking care of a young person with depression is stressful so make sure you attend to your own needs and get the support you need yourself.

WHAT TYPE OF TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE?

Treatment generally starts with a visit to the doctor. Treatment generally includes counselling, lifestyle changes and in some cases medication.
- **COUNSELLING**: Encourages positive attitudes, helps deal with underlying problems and teaches young people skills to help with stress management, relationships and communication.
- **LIFESTYLE CHANGES**: A balanced diet, regular exercise, regular sleep and reduced alcohol usage are some ways to improve well-being and mental health.
- **MEDICATION**: This is sometimes given to correct an imbalance in chemicals in the brain. The pros and cons of medication need to be discussed with a medical practitioner.

**WHERE TO GET HELP***

- Your doctor
- Psychiatrist
- Counsellor
- Your local community health centre
- Lifeline Tel. 131 114
- Mental Health Foundation Tel. (03) 9427 0407
- Alfred Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Tel. (03) 9526 4400
- SANE Australia Tel. (03) 9682 5933


**KEEP IN MIND**

1. **Adolescence is a difficult time for young people.** Most get through unscathed but some experience greater difficulty during this stage. Stresses that sound small to adults can be major to young people.
2. **Parental love and attention is a vital part of keeping kids emotionally healthy.** Making regular time for your young person is a preventative measure.
3. **It is important to seek professional help** for your young person as depression can be treated. If your young person won’t get help go yourself to get advice on how to best handle the situation.