Supporting children and young people experiencing depression

It's not your role to diagnose depression. However, if you have concerns about someone's mental health and wellbeing, there are ways you can support them.

What is depression?

Depression is a serious mental health condition that affects children and young people's mood, behaviour and thoughts about themselves and the world. Learn more about common signs and symptoms of depression.

How educators can help

Educators can support children and young people by being supportive and making time to listen.

Educators aren't responsible for diagnosing mental health conditions. However, they do play an important role in recognising when someone needs support and taking action.

If you have concerns about someone's low mood and behaviour, you can use the BETLS Observational Tool to help you gather and document information about the child or young person, as well as your concerns. You could then discuss this with your wellbeing team or senior staff about next steps.

If you are the best person to have the conversation, you can prepare for it, ensuring you are also looking after your own wellbeing. Then gently check in when it's an appropriate time for the child or young person to have a discussion.

Let them know you've noticed they might not be feeling like themselves (they might seem tearful, sad, withdrawn or angry) and you are there to listen if they want to talk. They might also want to do another activity to express themselves such as draw.

If they do want to talk, take time to listen without judgement. You don't need to have all the answers – showing interest and being present is key.

If they don't want to talk, let them know you are there for them and that you'll continue to check-in with them.

You can also work with your learning community's wellbeing or senior staff to support you and help with next steps.

Learn more about common signs and symptoms of depression in children and young people.

Talk with your learning community's wellbeing staff, or leadership

Such discussions may be useful in deciding the next steps to take in helping the child or young person. It may lead to a meeting with the family to talk further. Remember to also keep your learning community's policies and procedures as well as confidentiality in mind.

Connect with families and community

Working in partnership with families can help support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing. Share information sensitively and work together to understand whether changes in mood or behaviour are also happening at home. A shared understanding can help guide next steps and help educators gain a greater understanding of child or young

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person's cultural identity and community context.

Address bullying

If you believe that bullying may be impacting the child or young person's mental health and wellbeing, raise it with leadership and follow your learning community's policies and processes to ensure issues are addressed appropriately.

Provide opportunities for success

Let the child or young person know you have confidence in their ability and support them to succeed socially and academically.

Encourage getting involved

Praise and encourage children and young people for their efforts. Try to involve them in activities that are suitable for their age and stage. Keeping up with normal routines and activities can help with general mental health and wellbeing.

Build social and emotional skills

Support children and young people to build social and emotional skills, such as:

- developing self-awareness and recognise their feelings
- practising emotional regulation strategies
- building confidence and resilience through positive relationships and problem-solving.

These skills can help support children and young people to better understand and manage their emotions, work through challenges, and feel more able to thrive in their own way.

Encourage positive social relationships

Children and young people who experience depression may withdraw from social contact, have difficulty engaging with people around them or take part in less activities than normal. However, friends, family and community can provide important support. Remind other students about how to help everyone feel they belong.

Provide extra learning support

Help students to catch up If they have fallen behind. This support is particularly important, as falling behind in schoolwork can cause extra stress.

Provide mental health and wellbeing awareness and education activities

Promote help-seeking and discuss mental health and wellbeing with children and young people. Encourage ways to look after yourself such as:

- eating well
- connecting with friends and family
- getting enough sleep
- staying active
- limiting alcohol and other drugs.

For some children and young people this might include connecting to country, culture, community and other things that are important to their beliefs and values.

Promote a stable and positive learning environment

Create a sense of belonging in the learning community through strong relationship

embracing diversity and inclusive practices.

Be You Resources

Learn more about fostering inclusive practices.

Learn more about Cultural responsiveness and First Nations perspectives.

If more support is required

If you have concerns about a child or young person, follow your learning community's processes. This might include talking to your wellbeing or leadership team and using tools such as the BETLS observational tool to help understand what support might be needed.

Access external support when necessary

If a child or young person's behaviour changes and is persistent, this could be a sign they need

extra help. It's important to seek the support of your senior leadership or wellbeing staff.

Referrals to health professionals should be done with the child or young person (depending on their age), wellbeing staff and families. If a Mental health treatment plan is required, they will require support from their GP.

What support is available?

Different health professionals (such as GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists) offer different types of support and treatments for depression.

This also includes family support services, therapeutic providers such as occupational and speech therapists. Or it may include involving First Nations health services or LGBTIQ+ services.

Professional support can help the child or young person and their family learn skills to manage depression and support mental health and wellbeing.

Evidence shows that professional psychological support can reduce the time it takes to recover from depression and decrease the likelihood that another episode of depression will occur. Treatment may include cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), a professional support plan, and in some instances, it may involve the use of antidepressants.

Be You Resources

Learn more about accessing mental health support.

Learn more about looking after your own mental health and wellbeing.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about recognising behaviours that might indicate early signs of mental health issues, how to talk about these issues, and how to provide appropriate and timely support in the Early Support domain.

Bibliography

Visit Supporting children and young people experiencing depression for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

External links

Beyond Blue – 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 – Treatments for depression

headspace – Tips for healthy headspace

**Be You acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of all the Lands on which we work and learn.
We recognise their deep and ongoing connection to Country and pay our respect to Elders, past and present.**