

## More than Just a Bad Day: Understanding and Supporting Youth with Depression

### Depression

**Depression is a mood disorder which can cause people to feel sad, hopeless, irritable, angry, numb, or in other ways that negatively affect day to day living.**

Depression is different than the sadness experienced as a normal part of life which is temporary and usually reflects difficulties that have occurred. Clinical depression is not normal and occurs when an individual experiences prolonged depressive symptoms.

**Major Depressive Disorder should only be diagnosed by a trained mental health professional.** The criteria they will look at is:

- Has there been at least 2 weeks of depressed mood and loss of interest
- Is there 5 or more of these symptoms: depressed mood most of the day, loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed activities, significant weight changes and changes in appetite, difficulty sleeping or increased sleepiness, physical agitation or sluggishness, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, difficulty concentrating, and/or recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Are these symptoms a change from previous functioning, are they interfering with relationships or activities, and are they related to anything else like a medical illness or substance use.

**Non-suicidal self-injury** refers to the intentional destruction of one's body tissue without suicide intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned. This may occur with someone who is depressed, but it may not, and not everyone who engages in non-suicidal self-injury has depression.

**Suicide Risk:** Most children/adolescents who have depression will not suicide but it is very important that, even though it can be a scary topic, open conversations surrounding suicide allow safety to be planned for.

### Treatment

Depression is very treatable, especially if treatment starts early. A mix of treatments that fit the child/youths needs is often the best approach. Some recommendations / options may be:

**Psychoeducation and Support** – increasing the knowledge for both the child/ youth and their caregivers on what depression is and how to support someone with it is often the first step.

**Family Therapy** – used to develop strategies to take care of both the individuals and the family's wellbeing, and ensuring everyone is on the same page and able to maintain/ build healthy relationships.

**Individual Therapy** – This could include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Mindfulness Based Therapy, or another type of therapy to help the child/ youth understand their thoughts in a supportive and nonjudgmental setting.

**Medication** – there are different medication options to talk to a medical professional about, although it is statistically shown that medication works best when utilized alongside other treatments.

Don't expect to solve all problems by yourself and don't expect "quick fixes"!

### What Can Caregivers do to Help?

1. Remember depression is a real condition
2. Prioritize time with your child/youth
3. Explore volunteering or other fulfilling activities
4. Monitor technology
5. Be aware of any side effects of medication
6. Celebrate accomplishments
7. Remember that symptoms can return
8. Balance your involvement with your child/youth's need for privacy



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**Encourage a Healthy Lifestyle**

Exercise has been shown to be a very effective treatment for depression. More lifestyle choices that can have a positive effect are:

- Regular self-care (movement, journaling, creating art or music, etc)
- Healthy Eating
- Good Night Sleep
- Social Activities (peers and family)
- Relaxation Strategies
- Elimination of Alcohol and/or Drugs

**Protective Factors**

Depression can cause feelings of being unsettled, even at home where we hope to feel safe and supported. To help with this we can:

- Increase quality time with our child/youth
- Build motivation and self-esteem
- Reduce conflicts – choose your battles wisely
- Maintain and communicate consistent limits and expectations
- Ensure they have support from other, caring adults
- Become involved in their education or extracurriculars if possible

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**Resources**

- Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre: <http://kelytmentalhealth.ca/mental-health/disorders/depression>
- Teen Mental Health: [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)
- Child Mind: [www.childmind.org](http://www.childmind.org)
- Canadian Mental Health Association [http://www.cmha.ca/mental\\_health/children-and-depression](http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/children-and-depression)
- The Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP) <http://suicideprevention.ca/>
- Call Health Link Alberta: 811
- CYFAMH Intake: 780-342-2701
- Youth Addiction Services Edmonton: 780-422-7383
- Mobile Response Team: 780-427-4491
- Call 211 – Alberta Community resources
- CMHA Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

**Video Resources**

The Science of depression -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOK1tKFFIQI>

I had a Black Dog -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc>

Empathy -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Mental Health/Depression in Black Communities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywkxS-v0fZQ>