



What this fact sheet covers:

- Signs of depression in adolescence
- Where to get help for an adolescent
- Key points to remember.

Introduction

One in five children and adolescents is affected by mental health problems and disorders. Those aged 18-24 have the highest prevalence of mental disorders of any age group.

Depression in this age group should be taken seriously. Youth suicide is the third most common cause of death in this age group.

Both biological and developmental factors contribute to depression in adolescence. If *Bipolar disorder* or *psychosis* is suspected, biological causes would need to be examined.

Signs of depression in an adolescent

It is often hard to distinguish adolescent turmoil from depressive illness, especially as the young person is forging new roles within the family and struggling with independence, and academic and career decisions.

An adolescent who is depressed may not show obvious signs of depression. Instead, he or she may start to behave uncharacteristically, for example by:

- Becoming socially withdrawn
- Falling in their performance at school
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviours (e.g. reckless driving, inappropriate sexual involvements)
- Engaging in drug and alcohol abuse
- Sometimes a minor physical problem is used as a disguised appeal for help.

Where to get help for an adolescent

If you think your son or daughter, or someone you are close to, might be depressed, the first step is to either take them to a general practitioner, to the local Community Health Centre. The general practitioner will either conduct an assessment or refer the adolescent to a child and adolescent psychiatrist or mental health worker.

Other initial sources of help are school counsellors and trusted close family members to whom the adolescent feels comfortable talking.



Depression in adolescents & young people

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Sometimes the adolescent may not want to seek help. In this case it's best to explain that you are concerned and perhaps also provide them with some information to read about depression.

There are also some excellent websites designed for young people, as well as confidential online and telephone counselling services. (We list a number of these at the end of this sheet.)

It's important for young people to know that depression is a common problem and that there are people who can help.

If there is any talk of suicide this should be taken seriously and immediate help sought from a mental health professional.

Key points to remember

- Depression among young people is common, with one in five affected by mental health problems.
- It can be hard to distinguish depression from adolescent turmoil.
- Depression in an adolescent may be indicated by uncharacteristic behaviour such as withdrawing socially, dropping in performance at school, using drugs or alcohol, or engaging in risky behaviour.
- Professional help from a general practitioner or counsellor should be sought if depression is suspected.
- Immediate help should be obtained from a general practitioner or other mental health practitioner if an adolescent talks of suicide.

Where to get more information

- Do our self-test or watch our Depression Education Program (DepEd) www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- www.reachout.com.au
- www.headspace.org.au
- www.itsallright.org - a website established by SANE
- [Family Help Kit](#) issued by Centre for Mental Health, New South Wales Department of Health www.health.nsw.gov.au/policy/cmh/publications/Family_Help_Kit.pdf
- *Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association* www.aicafmha.net.au

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