

## Supporting a young person with depression or in crisis who engages in self harm

Although it is upsetting to see a young person with depression or in crisis, it is important to remember that everyone experiences tough times. Young people need to be encouraged and supported to find helpful, adaptive and safe ways to cope with their thoughts and feelings.

### Signs and symptoms

- Low mood, mood fluctuation or tearfulness
- Anxiety, agitation, increased reassurance seeking
- Confused/muddled thinking, difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Self-doubt and loss of self-esteem
- Loss of motivation and energy
- Lack of patience or irritability
- More withdrawn, isolating themselves from friends or family
- Refusal to go to school and/or deterioration in academic performance
- Struggles to complete usual daily functioning tasks
- Poor personal hygiene
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Feeling hopeless, not seeing the point in anything
- Feeling guilty, overwhelmed or responsible for things that are not solely their responsibility
- Fear about the future
- Self-harm or thoughts about ending their life
- Uncommunicative or has difficulty making decisions

Depression can also result in physical symptoms:

- Headaches
- Stomach and digestive upset
- Change of appetite (over or undereating)
- Changes to sleep patterns (over sleeping or being unable to sleep)
- Pain without a specific reason
- Fatigue and loss of energy or highly agitated

### Support strategies for depression

- Keep to a routine with activities in the morning, afternoon and evening, however small or simple
- Encourage them to look after themselves by eating well, exercising, sleeping, going out and not self-medicating with alcohol, drugs, nicotine or caffeine
- Help them identify hobbies, interactions and activities outside of education
- Break down goals into small steps. Ask how you can support or help them to achieve them

### Top tips on how to approach a young person you have concerns about

- Stay calm yourself
- Find time; don't rush the conversation
- Be prepared for a them to deny or play down a difficulty
- Be prepared to listen, acknowledge and validate their emotions and thoughts
- Let them know you want to understand, help and support
- If they do not want to talk, see if they will write you a note, email or text message about how they feel
- Ask if they would rather speak to someone else, such as a GP, school counsellor or helpline
- Try to think together of ways to handle strong feelings that don't involve risk behaviour. Make a mini-crisis plan
- Help them think through their problems and see possible solutions
- Encourage them to think about the long view and how things may change in the future

**If a young person has taken an overdose this is a medical emergency and you must seek urgent medical help. Call 999 immediately.**

### Useful resources

- Talk to your GP or school nurse
- Young Minds Parent Helpline: 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am-4pm)

Websites:

- [www.thecalmzone.org.uk](http://www.thecalmzone.org.uk)
- [www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)
- [www.harmless.org.uk](http://www.harmless.org.uk)
- [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)