

HELPING A YOUNG PERSON WHO FEELS DEPRESSED

*This document has been produced by Clyst Vale Community College's
Counselling Service.*

*This is not intended to be a definitive guide, but does hope to provide support to families
with a young person who feels depressed.*

If someone in your family has been identified as suffering from depression they are not alone. Currently, research suggests one in six of us will suffer some form of mental health issue in our lifetime; depression is one of the most common conditions.

Depression can strike both children and adults. Research suggests depression can be effectively treated through counselling, unless severe and then a combination of counselling and medication is recommended.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a feeling of sadness or wretchedness that cannot be shaken off, or snapped out of. We can all experience 'lows', but these pass. Depression hangs around and makes a person feel miserable all the time.

There are various degrees of depression, some are deeper or 'darker' than others. The young person may be suffering a mild form, through to a heavy depression. All forms are debilitating in some way.

SYMPTOMS

Classic symptoms of depression are:

- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Waking up early in the morning
- Not being able to sleep
- Sometimes, not even being able to get out of bed
- Thoughts of despair or lack of hope, even when you dream
- Always looking at the bad and missing or dismissing the good
- Irritability

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

People can fall into a depression in many ways. The most common ways are as follows:

- As a result of suffering long term stress
- Bereavement
- Long term illness
- Low self-esteem
- Unexpressed anger
- Anxiety
- Unfinished business

Typically there are two ways into a depression. The first is the result of a sudden shock or severe event, such as a bereavement. The second is slower and can happen over a long period of time, until the person finds themselves unable to cope with their situation any longer.

Often people succumb to depression when they are experiencing difficulties in more than one area of their life. If things at school are difficult and things at home are tense or sad, then depression may follow.

WHAT THE COUNSELLORS WILL DO

People who suffer depression usually have an identifiable underlying cause. The counsellor will try to help the young person find out what it is and help them work through it. The counsellor will encourage the young person to share their thoughts and feelings with a parent or guardian.

SOUND ADVICE FOR SOMEONE SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION

- Avoid the company of other people suffering from depression
- Take up regular exercise, it is the most natural cure for depression
- Work with a counsellor
- Even if you don't feel like it, try to do things a person without depression would do; research suggests this can promote a better sense of well-being and help lift a depression
- Try to have some fun

OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT DEPRESSION

Some people believe depression is a message from the body that something is wrong in their life. Try to work out what that might be and try to resolve it.

Sometimes the thing that is wrong cannot be made better. If this is the case, then you need to work on accepting things the way they are. A counsellor can help you do both of these things.

Try to express your anger, the school has a leaflet to help you with this too.

Try to talk about anything making you feel sad.

SEEING A DOCTOR

The counsellors at Clyst Vale Community College are very familiar with all forms of depression and their treatment. However we are not qualified to diagnose the condition or be solely responsible for its treatment.

If the counsellor has shared their assessment, they will usually say whether they believe the depression is mild or heavy. Either way, it's best to consult with a doctor, who can make a fuller diagnosis, prescribe anti-depressants if necessary and put the student in touch with other health care workers if they feel it is appropriate.

STIGMA

Unfortunately in our society there is a stigma attached to suffering any form of mental ill-health such as depression. This can lead to the student feeling embarrassed or ashamed.

Please try to help the young person feel normal, perhaps by saying being depressed is just the same as having a cold – you can't help it, it just happens – and can happen to anyone.

AND FINALLY...

A person suffering from depression may feel and believe they will never get better again. This is untrue, though may take some convincing because of the very nature of the condition.

Most people recover from depression and never experience it again. Those that do can learn to recognise and 'read' their depression, to help them identify when things are going badly and help them manage or even avoid a full bout of depression.

Some useful websites are:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Pathways/depression/Pages/Landing.aspx?WT.srch=1>

(NHS site)

<http://www.mind.org.uk/Information/Booklets/Understanding/Understanding+depression.htm>

(Mind)