

What can I do to help?

When children are feeling down there are a number of things parents can do:

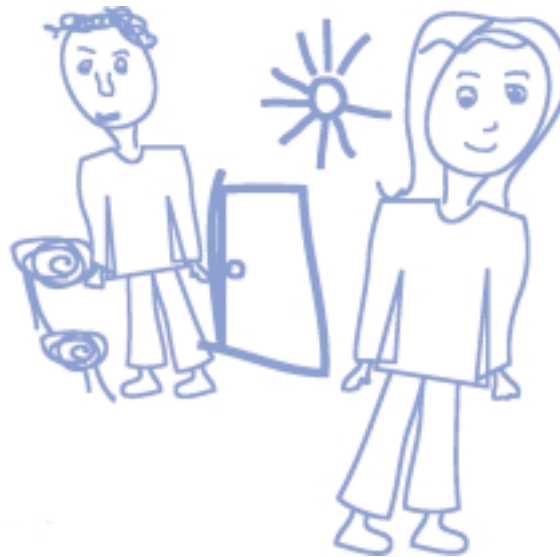
- take your child's feelings seriously and encourage him or her to talk about them
- encourage your child to think positively
- listen thoughtfully and offer help
- spend some time together doing things your child would like to do
- encourage your child to talk to someone they trust
- assure your child it is OK to ask for help when needed.

Practical tips:

- Offer to help them out if there are problems with school, peers, etc. For example, go to school with them, watch the game of sport, learn relaxation skills/ activities with your child.
- Try to get a better understanding of your child's world.
- Talk to others (family, friends, teachers) to help you try and understand what is happening.

It may also be helpful to encourage your child to:

- spend time with friends
- join in sports, school activities or hobbies
- be involved in organisations that provide support for children and offer them the opportunity to develop other interests e.g. Scouts.



Who can I contact?

If you are concerned about your child, it may be useful to contact:

- your general practitioner
- a paediatrician
- a psychologist
- your local community health centre.

If you feel that your child's situation is urgent and you live in the Western Metropolitan Region, you may consider contacting:

- **The Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service**
Intake Service on **1800 44 55 11**
between 9.00am – 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday.



depression

Depression

We all feel sad and depressed at times; however, “clinical” depression is different. It is more than just the normal feelings of sadness. It is a real illness and early treatment is very important.

What can contribute to depression?

Children and adolescents can be depressed for a number of reasons:

- difficult experiences, such as family break up, consistent bullying
- changes in circumstances, for example, change of home or school, parents separating, illness, loss of income in the family
- personal changes which can affect children as they grow older and make them more aware of how their peers see them. This can lead to low self esteem and a sense of failure.
- parents who are under stress or depressed
- sometimes there is no obvious reason.

Loss and grieving

Feeling sad is a necessary part of dealing with the death of someone close. It is an important stage of the grieving process which helps the child accept what has happened. Children recover from grieving faster than adults. If, after several months, your child doesn't seem to be getting over the loss, it may be important to seek professional help.



How do I know what to look for?

Children or adolescents who are suffering with depression may show different signs from adults. Because we often think it is normal for children and adolescents to be moody, it can be difficult to know when they are depressed. When asked, they may say that nothing is wrong; they do not always understand or express their feelings very well.

If one or more of the following signs of depression continue, you may need to seek professional advice:

- feeling down consistently for more than two weeks
- poor concentration
- hopelessness – like there is nothing left to look forward to
- lack of energy and lack of self care
- crying without a reason
- eating or sleeping too much or not enough
- doesn't seem to enjoy favourite activities
- not wanting to be around family or friends
- getting headaches and stomach aches
- changes at school - no enjoyment, drop in academic achievement
- a focus on depressing topics, music, books

- seems moody, can be grumpy and sometimes inappropriately happy
- confused with time, misses regular activities.

If your child begins to show a preoccupation with death, dying or self harm ask for help.

How can I look after myself?

Caring for a child with depression can often lead to feelings that can be overwhelming, such as anger, guilt or sadness. These may be normal responses to the stress that you are experiencing. It is important that you have enough support from family and friends to help you. It may also be helpful to find out about any support groups that you could contact.

By looking after yourself, you will be better able to look after the special needs of your child.

Dealing with a child who is experiencing depression can often have an effect on other parts of your life. For example, it can put a strain on your relationships with other family members. Counselling may be helpful in working through some of these issues. Sorting out these problems will also help your child.