

## The young person's guide to overcoming low mood and depression

Difficult events and experiences can make us feel sad. Many young people feel down when they encounter relationship problems, [bereavement](#), sleep problems, stress at school, bullying or illness. Sometimes, there may not be an obvious reason for having a low mood.

### How can I manage my low mood?

#### 1. Talk to a trusted adult

- It may seem difficult to talk to adults. We may feel that our family members do not understand what is going on and how to help.
- We can start by building bonds with our family members. For example, we can start by having a conversation with them about everyday matters. From there, it may be easier to talk about more personal matters once we feel connected with them about our daily lives.
- If a family member is not available, consider approaching another trustworthy adult such as a teacher or school counsellor.
- A trusted adult can usually guide us on how to resolve a difficult situation.

#### 2. Keep connected

- Be in the company of friends who will listen and lend their support in positive and safe ways. Organise meet-ups and engage in an activity together.
- Be involved in activities we enjoy. Try a sport, or join an art, dance or music class! It is never too late to start on a new hobby. It can be helpful to include these activities in our daily routines.

- Be a volunteer. Serving others gives us a joyful sense of satisfaction. There are plenty of opportunities to extend a helping hand in our community. Refer to [www.giving.sg](http://www.giving.sg) for volunteering opportunities.

#### 3. Adopt healthy habits

- Exercise often. This can release “feel-good” chemicals into the brain that helps to improve mood.
- Have a balanced diet. For healthy minds and bodies, we need nutritious food such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Keep away from alcohol and drugs. They may provide temporary relief but have long-term negative effects.
- Adopt healthy sleep habits. Have a regular bedtime routine. Many young people have a habit of watching online videos or using social media late into the night. They feel moody the next day because they have insufficient sleep. Therefore, reduce screen time if you can!

A low mood will usually lift after a few days or weeks. If it does not go away, this can be a sign of depression.

### **What are some symptoms of depression?**

- Feeling sad most of the time for 2 weeks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor or increased appetite
- Sleep disturbances (either too little or too much)
- Feeling physically tired despite having enough sleep
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in activities that usually bring joy
- Sense of hopelessness or helplessness
- Recurrent thoughts of dying
- Using unhelpful coping strategies e.g. self-harm, substance use

### **How to tell if I need professional help?**

Depression is treatable! You do not need to struggle on your own!

#### ***Seeking help is a sign of strength!***

Please seek professional help if:

- You feel like you are unable to keep yourself safe
- Or if your mood does not improve

### **Useful resources:**

#### **1)Mindline**

<https://www.mindline.sg/>

This website is a trusted platform with many resources to improve the emotional wellbeing of people in Singapore. You can also learn more about coping with low mood and stress through the online self-assessment tool.

#### **2)Community Health Assessment Team, CHAT,**

<https://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg>

CHAT, is a national outreach and mental health check program under the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) which has been helping young people (16-30 yrs old) in Singapore with mental health concerns since 2009.

#### **3)Beyond Blue,**

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/young-people>

This is a health promotion charity with a mission to reduce the prevalence and impact of depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia.

#### **4)Smiling Mind**

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>

This is a free mindfulness app suitable for children and young people, developed by a non-profit organization which runs youth-based mindfulness programs in Australia.

#### **5)Calm Harm**

<https://stem4.org.uk/story/#>

This is a free app to help teenagers manage or resist the urge to self-harm. It is designed by Stem4, a charity that promotes positive mental health in teenagers in the UK.

### **Useful telephone numbers**

- Samaritans of Singapore  
1800 221 4444 (24 hours)
- Singapore Association for Mental Health  
1800 283 7019
- Singapore Children's Society (Tinkle Friend)  
1800 2744 788
- Community Health and Assessment Team  
6493 6500 (Tuesday to Friday 1-8pm)

## Parent's Guide to managing low mood/ depression in young people

Mental health issues in young people are common and treatable. Parents are usually in the best position to get initial help for their child struggling with low mood or depression.

### **What are some symptoms of depression?**

- Feeling sad or irritable most of the time for 2 weeks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor or increased appetite
- Sleep disturbances (either too little or too much)
- Feeling physically tired despite having enough sleep
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in activities that usually bring joy
- Sense of hopelessness or helplessness
- Recurrent thoughts of dying
- Using unhelpful coping strategies e.g. self-harm, substance use

### **How to communicate with a young person?**

#### **1. Focus on listening, not lecturing.**

- Be genuinely interested and curious about what your child is telling you.

#### **2. Be gentle but persistent.**

- It can be difficult to control your emotions when the young person is shutting you out or being rude. Understand that they may be having difficulties expressing their emotions and experiences.

### **3. Validate their feelings.**

- Acknowledge and communicate that their emotions and experiences are heard. Accept that their emotions and experiences are important even though you may not understand or agree.

### **How to support a young person with depression?**

1. Prioritise quality interaction with your child. This will help make them feel and know that you are available when they need you.

2. Keep them connected and active. Encourage them to be involved in activities or exercises they enjoy, especially with friends. It can be a sport or class that is related to the young person's interests and talents.

You may also wish to participate in these activities with them. This can help to improve your relationship with your child.

3. Encourage volunteering. This can help to boost their self-esteem. Help your child select an area of volunteer service that suits his/her interest and talent. Refer to [www.giving.sg](http://www.giving.sg) for volunteering opportunities.

4. Provide balanced meals. Stay hydrated. Nutritious food like dairy, vegetables, fruits, wholegrain and protein can optimize their mental and physical health.

5. Adopt healthy sleep habits. Involve your child in developing a regular sleep routine and set limits on screen time. Sleep deprivation commonly contributes to a low mood.

6. Maintain a safe environment for the young person. You may want to check-in on the young person regularly. Monitor for warning signs of suicide. Keep sharp objects and medication in locked cabinets.

### **What are some warning signs of suicide?**

When the young person:

- Talks or posts online about committing suicide
- Gives away prized and treasured possessions
- Says goodbye to friends and family as if for the last time
- Seeks out weapons, pills or other ways to end their own lives.

### **When to seek professional help?**

Depression is treatable. There is no shame or stigma in seeking help.

Please seek professional help if:

- You are concerned that your child is showing warning signs of suicide.
- Or if their symptoms of depression are not improving

### **Useful resources:**

Please refer to the list of useful resources listed in the brochure given to your child.

In addition, you may want to explore these apps:

#### 1) Combined Minds

“Combined Minds” is free app for caregivers/ families who want to support a young person with a diagnosed mental health condition (Anxiety/ Depression/ Self-Harm/ Eating Disorder/ Digital Addiction), It uses a ‘Strengths-Based’ Approach.

It is designed by Stem4, a charity that promotes positive mental health in teenagers in the UK.

**Stem4** <https://stem4.org.uk/story/#>

2) Other apps that may help with mood and emotions include “CALM”, “Wysa” and “Headspace”. As these apps are not specifically designed for adolescents, and contain in-app purchase components, they are not in the list that are directly recommended to your child.

### **Useful telephone numbers**

- Samaritans of Singapore  
1800 221 4444 (24 hours)
- Singapore Association for Mental Health  
1800 283 7019
- Singapore Children’s Society (Tinkle Friend)  
1800 2744 788
- Community Health and Assessment Team  
(for 16 to 30yrs old)  
6493 6500 (Tuesday to Friday 1-8pm)

## Self-harm Means Restriction Checklist.

### A Caregiver Guide for Safety at Home

#### 1. Ensure that the environment at home is safe

- Keep window grills and balcony grills locked. If unable to lock, consider using a padlock or a bicycle chain to secure them
- Keep all items that can be used for self-harm in a lockable drawer. Examples include belts, ropes, blades, scissors, knives, bleach and all medicine.
- Keep a lookout for items in your child's room that may cause harm to him/her
- Keep all prescribed medicine and ensure that it is being dispensed by a carer and not left in the possession of the child
- Do not leave your child alone at home and keep him/her accompanied for all outings

#### 2. Things to do at home

- Consider coming up with a timetable with your child and fill it up with activities that he/ she enjoys (e.g watching a comedy, playing a board game)
- Consider light exercise and a walk with your child

- Set aside time to talk to your child about his/her concerns and worries
- Encourage your child to communicate their thoughts on self-harm and suicide. To consider using alternative methods such as email, text message or penning down their thoughts if they are not comfortable talking about it directly
- Consider activities such as deep-breathing, meditation, prayer or massage as a way to help them manage their stress and anxiety

#### 3. Self-care for carers

- Get help from other family members and friends to take turns caring for your child
- Take time to talk and get support from someone you trust and respect
- Find time to take a break and do something you enjoy once in a while
- Call the Caregiver's Association of the Mentally Ill (CAMI) 24Hr Helpline at 67829371 for advice and support.

#### 4. What to do if you are concerned that things are getting worse before your appointment with a mental health professional?

- Call the Department of Psychological Medicine at 63942205 only if your child is already on follow-up with the Psychiatrist in KKH

- Call the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) Crises Hotline 24Hr Hotline at 83892222 for advice
- Bring your child to the IMH Emergency Room if you are unable to manage your child safely at home
- If your child has harmed himself/herself physically, bring him/her to the Children's Emergency for immediate medical attention
- Alternatively, contact the police at 999 for assistance if you are unable to bring him/her to a place of safety

#### 5. Consider the following contacts if your child prefers to speak to someone outside of the family or the treating team.

##### Useful telephone contacts

- Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) 24hrs: 1800-2214444
  - Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH): 1800-2837019
  - Tinkle Friend (Singapore Children's Society- for primary school children): Mon-Fri 2.30pm - 5.00pm 1800-2744788
  - Touchline for youths: Mon-Fri 9.00am - 6.00pm 1800-3772252
- #### 6. If your child already has an appointment in KKH, but you want to get an earlier appointment date.
- Central appointment hotline: 62944050