

Factsheet 8

Young People's Mental Health

When you hear the words mental health, what do you think of? Do words like 'nuts' or crazy come to mind? They probably do with most people but that's not what mental health is about. The word 'mental' simply means 'to do with your mind' and mental health is about how healthy your mind is. It is about your thoughts, moods and how you deal with the 'ups' and 'downs' of life. Good mental health doesn't mean you're in a good mood all the time, that's impossible. It means you enjoy good times, cope with bad times and bounce back afterwards.

Mood matters!

It's normal to have 'good' and 'bad' moods and these change all the time, depending on what's happening to you. You're probably in a good mood when your team wins or you're going out with friends, and feel happy and excited. You might be in a bad mood when you have too much homework or break up with your boy/girlfriend, and feel sad or angry. Even the bad moods don't usually last long but this all depends on what you think about the situation and also what you do about it (your behaviour). About the break up, you might think "I'll never get over this" or "I'll never feel the same about anyone else". Then you might stop talking to friends, going out or enjoying things. You might cry a lot or pick fights with people (behaviour). Thinking and behaving like this is unhelpful. Your mood will probably get worse and you might even lose friends. A more helpful way to think might be "This is really hard, but I'm strong and I will get through it". A more helpful way to behave might be to do something you enjoy with friends and talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling.

Most likely, by talking to people you trust, getting the right support and trying out some of the self-help tips

at the end of this factsheet, you will get through difficult times and feel better again. However, if the moods are lasting a long time (a few weeks or more), are more than you can cope with, and affect your daily activities and relationships, it might be depression.

What is depression like

"At the minute I feel lost, lonely and can't see that changing for me. I feel like I'm drifting, I drifted through my exams and I'm still drifting." "I didn't feel right... I was so sad all the time. I found school really difficult. It was difficult to talk to people and I lost my confidence."

That's what two young people said about it. Many young people become depressed but don't realise what is happening and, more importantly, that with help they will get better. Depression is very common, especially among teenagers. Half of all teenagers feel stressed most of the time and up to 1 in 5 have depression. 1 in 10 do not believe life is worth living.

How would I know if I had depression

Depression affects your thoughts, feelings (emotions), your body (physical symptoms) and your behaviour

What you might think

"I'm useless, nothing ever goes right, life isn't worth living"

What you might feel

Unhappy, worried, guilty, angry

Your body

Aches & pains, tired, problems sleeping, put on weight or lose weight



Behaviour

Cry, stay in, forget things, eat more or less, hurt yourself, alcohol and/or drugs

Why do people get depression

- **Heredity:** having a parent or close relative who has had depression may increase your risk
- **Environment:** things that are happening now such as stress at school, bullying, loneliness, drinking alcohol or using drugs
- **Life events and experiences:** things in your past that were difficult for you like bullying, abuse, someone dying
- **Personality:** being very sensitive or always want to be best at everything. It's not **what** happens to us but **how we deal with it** that matters.

What helps for depression

The first, most important thing to do is **TALK** about it no matter how hard.

Tell someone who can help, an adult that you trust and who won't judge you. Talk with your friends; they may understand more than you think. If you feel you really can't talk to

someone face-to-face, phone **Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. Lifeline is a telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress or despair.** . It is available 24/7 and is even free from mobiles!

Allow time for fun and relaxation. This helps us feel better and increases our confidence. Doing something we enjoy probably means we're good at it and achieving something boosts our self-esteem.

Learn the facts. You've taken the first step by reading this factsheet. See your GP. He/she will decide what help or treatment is right for you. Getting practical help with problems and making changes to your lifestyle may be enough, or some sort of talking treatment or counselling might help. If you're feeling very low, you may need to take anti-depressants. These don't always work for under-eighteens or might make you feel a bit worse before you start to feel better. When they do work, they work well but your GP will want to see you regularly while you are taking them.

Keep as active and busy as possible. Physical exercise helps lift our mood, reduces stress and anxiety, improves physical health, and gives us more energy. Doing things can help us forget our worries for a while and change our mood.

See our Factsheet 3 for more information on looking after your mental health. Take slow, small steps and choose activities that suit you. Don't forget to plan rest/relaxation periods too and remember most people with depression recover fully.



For details about our other services, publications and fact sheets, or for general information about our charity, visit our website: www.aware-ni.org.uk or call our helpline on 08451 20 29 61

