

Depression: Suggestions for school staff

Children who are depressed have difficulty concentrating in class and completing their work. They may have difficulty relating to classmates and to teaching staff. Their learning suffers and there may be long-term effects on their school achievement unless they receive professional support promptly.

How school staff can help

School staff can notice signs of depression by observing changes in children's behaviour and mood. They can address any school-based triggers that may be impacting on children's mental health and wellbeing. Peer group difficulties, especially bullying, are common triggers for children's depression.

Connect with parents and carers

It is important to share information obtained through school observation and to find out whether the child's mood is similar at home. When mood and behaviour changes are evident in more than one setting (eg home and school) it usually indicates that the child's mental health difficulties are more serious.

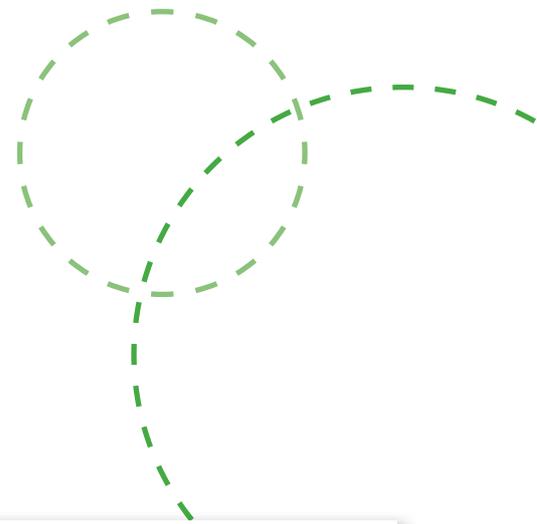
Talk with the school student wellbeing staff, psychologist or counsellor about your concerns

Discussion may be helpful in coming to a conclusion about what should be done to help the child who has raised concern. It may lead to a meeting being set up with the parent or carer to talk further.

Give positive feedback

This is important for all children. It is even more important when children are depressed, as they may have a tendency to screen out positives and tune into negative feedback about themselves which can maintain their low mood.





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Provide opportunities for success

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Encourage getting involved

Children with depression may lack their usual level of energy and complain of being bored. Provide praise and encouragement for their efforts. Try to engage them in physical activity and pleasant events.

Model positive actions

Label experiences to encourage interactions that promote positivity. For example: "That was fun," "I liked Jack's joke. It made me smile," "I like stories with happy endings. They make me feel happy too."

Foster positive social relationships

Children who are depressed often withdraw from social contact. However, friends can be important supports. You may need to remind others about how to help everyone feel they belong.

Teach problem-solving skills

These can help children who are depressed to generate a range of possible effective solutions.

Provide extra learning support

School staff may be able to help the child to catch up once the depression has started to lift. This is important as falling behind in school work can be a source of stress that may aggravate depression.



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

