

Helping a child experiencing low mood/depression

This leaflet has been created to help school staff to support a child experiencing low mood or depression.

What is low mood/depression?

Feeling sad is a normal reaction to everyday life experiences. However, when these feelings continue and begin to interfere with a child's enjoyment of life, they may be feeling depressed.

In its mildest form, depression can mean a child feels low. This may not stop them from leading a normal life, but makes everything harder to do and less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make a child feel suicidal.

Depression can be caused by lots of things such as life experiences, family history, bullying, feeling like they have lack of support or it may even run in their family.

What might I see in the child?

A child might display or experience different behaviours, signs and feelings such as:

Feeling: Worthless, hopeless, moody, guilty or helpless.

Behaviours: Tearful, irritable, withdrawn, avoiding friends and family, lack of interest in appearance, difficulty in concentrating.

Thoughts: 'I don't deserve any help', 'what's the point?', Dismissing the positives, negative thinking patterns, including not wanting to live anymore.

Physical signs: Tired, eating changes, changes in sleep pattern, aches & pains, slowing of speech.



Nine ideas to support a child:

1. Break things down into small steps and celebrate when achieved.
2. Encourage the child to exercise regularly and keep an eye on diet, avoiding sugary/fatty foods and stimulants.
3. Gently encourage the child to continue to do activities previously enjoyed - even if the enjoyment has lessened.
4. Try to identify any factors that may be contributing to the child's low mood such as environmental issues, age-related, physical illness, friendship issues, etc.
5. Help the child to identify a trustworthy adult to talk to.
6. Help the child to identify and access a safe place.
7. Encourage the child to be around people who are caring and positive. Both negative and positive thoughts are contagious.
8. Think about the classroom environment and things that may make a child feel vulnerable. Think about sitting the child next to a friend, being mindful about the pressures of group work, giving the option to opt out when appropriate.
9. Introduce mood boosting activities for the whole class such as the golden mile (a run or walk around the school), singing, mindfulness exercises, a class chant, or watching a funny YouTube clip etc.

If the child is still giving you cause for concern, speak to your ROAR/MHFA member of staff for further advice.

Further information can be found at www.liverpoolcamhs.com/need-advice