



A guide for parents and caregivers to support youth

Coping During COVID: DEPRESSION

Depression can hide in plain sight, even at the best of times.

Figuring out if the feelings you're having are more than run-of-the-mill blues can be difficult. And during the coronavirus crisis, when everyone seems to be having a hard time, it's even more difficult to understand the difference between a bad mood and depression.

It's normal to feel worried, frustrated or a bit hopeless right now, but if your mind is playing negative thoughts on loop (I'm useless...stupid...unlovable...things are never going to get better), or you're feeling totally overwhelmed by small setbacks — like bursting into tears when you can't find your phone, or snapping at a family member over something small and then feeling terrible about it — or you're barely able to get out of bed, it is time to get some help.

Checking in with yourself, especially if you have a history of depression, can help you spot struggles and notice when it's time to ask for help.



Blue Shield of California and the Child Mind Institute are teaming up to provide resources and share the latest research on youth mental health as part of Blue Shield of California's BlueSky youth mental health initiative.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS OR CONSIDERING SUICIDE, HELP IS AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW. Call 911 immediately if you're concerned that you or a friend are unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm, or may be suicidal or overdosing. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.

**TWO FREE, 24-HR,
ANONYMOUS HOTLINES**

Crisis Text Line:
text UROK to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
call 1-800-273-8255

Signs that you might be struggling with depression include:

- ✓ Feeling down much of the day, for more days than not
- ✓ Losing interest in things you used to love or look forward to — even if restrictions mean you may not be able to go out to meet friends, there seems to be a loss of interest in even talking anymore
- ✓ Feeling unusually angry, grumpy, argumentative or reactive
- ✓ Feeling on-edge — the littlest things seem to upset you or leave you overwhelmed
- ✓ Involuntary changes in weight, either weight gain or weight loss, beyond what's normal for your body
- ✓ Changes in your sleep patterns — sleeping too little or too much
- ✓ Feeling sluggish or lethargic — trouble getting off the couch or even out of bed
- ✓ Judging yourself harshly
- ✓ Engaging in self-harming behaviors, like cutting or otherwise hurting yourself
- ✓ Feeling hopeless, worthless or numb
- ✓ Finding that basic self-care activities, like showering, require a lot of effort
- ✓ Having more difficulty concentrating than usual, especially if due to consistent negative thoughts
- ✓ Thinking about or attempting suicide

Managing Depression

Depression can feel overwhelming, but there are steps you can take that will help:

➦ **Be active:** This can seem easier said than done when so many things we used to do — going to a fitness class, jogging with friends — may be off-limits, but it doesn't have to be difficult. Exercise releases chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that can improve your mood and boost your energy. Find something that works for you: taking a walk outside, following a short workout video, doing jumping jacks during short breaks, anything that gets your heart rate up.

“

I never really understood the purpose of [being active], and it always felt bothersome in the moment. However, ...taking a short walk outside or in the park can boost my energy and improve my overall mood.

CECILY, AGE 17

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🚩 **Set goals:** Goals can be anything: taking a shower, talking to a friend, making dinner once a week, finishing a project or organizing your room — whatever helps you find motivation. Starting with small, achievable goals will help you build momentum and progress. Setting goals can increase your ability to manage your symptoms and help you feel a sense of accomplishment.

🗨️ **Stay in touch:** Make a list of the people you can turn to and make plans to connect. Knowing who to call or text when you need help can make it easier to reach out. You could agree that you'll text a friend every day or have a standing physically distant date to take a weekly walk together.

😊 **Practice self-care:** Self-care might sound like a buzzword, but it's just another way of being kind to yourself. It can be taking a hot bath, exercising, doing art, skateboarding, journaling, gaming, meditating, watching something that makes you laugh — anything that helps you feel relaxed or energized in a healthy way. Be conscious of what you're reading and watching (and posting) on social media. It's important to be informed, but be conscious of what you're taking in and how it makes you feel. Stick with accounts, channels and shows that bring you joy, not ones that bring you down.

🏠 **Prioritize wellness:** Taking care of your body can also help ease depression symptoms. Remember: this doesn't mean getting in perfect shape or dieting. Just being intentional about making healthy choices like eating well, staying away from drugs and alcohol, getting regular sleep and prioritizing your own wellbeing.

Helping Friends in Need

The pandemic has taken a toll on everyone's mental health. If you notice a friend seems unusually down or withdrawn, it's a good idea to check in and see how they're doing.

When you do, try to listen without judgment and avoid taking on the role of "problem-solver" unless your friend asks for that kind of help. Sometimes just knowing you're there and you care can be a huge help.

🚫 **Set boundaries:** When someone you love is struggling, it can feel overwhelming. It's important to remember that it's not your job to "fix" someone or take care of them by yourself. Just being a friend is enough. Setting boundaries is healthy and important. It's okay to say, "I'm here for you, but I'm not a professional." If a friend is seriously struggling, encourage them to talk to their parents or another trusted adult and get connected to professional help.

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I think [setting boundaries] is something a lot of people need to hear. It's hard to not get caught in the echo chamber of stress and worries.

CAROLINE, AGE 16



When to Get Help

You are not alone. The prevalence of depression and anxiety in our communities over the last year has significantly increased, and many people are learning to ask for help. Sometimes depression just isn't something you can handle on your own. If the struggle with mental health is interfering with your ability to get through the day or you're having thoughts of hurting yourself, it's time to get help.

Start by talking to your parents, a teacher, or another adult you trust and ask them to help connect you with a mental health professional. A professional who's worked with many young people with depression can make a big difference in your life.

What to expect from treatment

Treatment for depression can include therapy, medication or a combination of both. Getting the right treatment can make all the difference. Here are common therapies that are available:

- + **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** helps you change thinking and behavior patterns that contribute to depression, including challenging negative thoughts and engaging in activities that improve your mood.
- + **Interpersonal therapy (IPT)** focuses on relationships with peers and family, and how they can positively (and negatively) affect mood and behavior.
- + **Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)** is a treatment for teenagers and adults who have difficulty managing extreme emotions, particularly when those emotions are linked to self-harm and thoughts of suicide.
- + **Medication:** Antidepressants can be a helpful form of treatment for some people and work in a number of ways to alter or supplement body chemistry linked to depression.

Professionals can be found by talking to parents or other people you trust, using Psychology Today or through an insurance provider. WebMD provides a helpful guide on how to start your search and what to look for, but should not take the place of actual medical advice from a professional.

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