

How to Help Children with Depression

“Caring for Children’s Mental Health Parent Education Series

Education Bureau 2022

What is “Depression”?

Joy, anger, sadness and happiness are the emotional changes that everyone has. However, if negative emotion persists, and is accompanied by other prolonged negative thoughts and behaviours, or even physical symptoms, which significantly interfere with the daily functioning, it may be the signs of having Depression.

Common symptoms of Depression include:

Emotional Aspect

- Prolonged depressed mood or feeling empty
- Agitation

Physiological Aspect

- Difficulty concentrating
- Marked decrease or increase in appetite or body weight
- Fatigue or low energy

Cognitive Aspect

- Losing interest or motivation in almost all matters
- Feeling guilty, helpless, or worthless easily

Behavioural Aspect

- Psychomotor retardation
- Social withdrawal
- Unwilling to participate in activities one used to enjoy
- Lack of learning motivation (e.g. failing to hand in homework frequently or declined school performance)

Role of Parents

If I suspect that my child has Depression, I should...

- Seek psychiatric consultation and assessment for my child as early as possible, so that appropriate treatment and support training can be arranged for him/her
- Initiate contact with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), class teacher, the School Guidance Team or school social workers for arrangement of appropriate support services

After my child has been assessed as having Depression, I should...

- Cooperate with healthcare professionals in undertaking the suggested treatment plan to make sure that my child receives the treatments he/she needs and takes medication as prescribed (if applicable)
- Take the initiative to provide the school with the information about my child’s special educational needs as early as possible, including passing his/her psychiatric report to the school for arrangement of appropriate support services
- Maintain communication with the School Guidance Team or school social workers, SENCO, Student Support Team, class teacher and subject teachers to understand my child’s learning and adjustment condition; and jointly discuss appropriate support strategies if necessary

The following strategies may be considered when supporting your child:

Communication Skills and Emotion Management

- Listen patiently and show empathy. Encourage your child to express his/her emotions, understand his/her feelings and thoughts from his/her perspective, and accept him/her, so that your child would regard you as companions
- Spend time with your child. Parents should talk more with your child and stay with him/her when necessary to relieve his/her depressed emotions
- Accept your child’s declining performance. Give your child comfort and encouragement rather than blame and criticism
- Explore and recognize your child’s strengths, appreciate his/her progress, and help him/her build a positive self-concept

Daily Life

- Encourage your child to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Maintain a balanced diet, have adequate rest/sleep every day, and regularly participate in relaxing activities or exercises
- Participate in social interactions. Encourage your child to engage in physical activities or entertainments with friends or family to help establish connections with others and gain social support
- To help your child concentrate, break tasks into smaller parts for completing gradually

Support Measures and Strategies

In general, schools may provide the following support according to the needs of individual students:

Helping the Student on School Adjustment

- Arrange a safe and quiet place for the student to regulate his/her depressed emotion when necessary
- Help the student explore activities that may help him/her improve his/her emotion. Allow the student to participate in those activities at appropriate time
- Arrange suitable class duties for the student so that he/she can gain successful experience to help boost his/her self-confidence and sense of competence
- Provide group training or individual counselling for the student in need to improve his/her emotion management and problem-solving skills
- Make flexible arrangements when handling requirements on the student's routines and attendance according to the student's conditions and needs

Helping the Student Get Along and Communicate with Teachers and Peers

- Praise the student on his/her positive behaviours and encourage him/her to express his/her emotions
- Arrange friendly peers to provide appropriate support in school

Engaging the Student in Learning Activities

- Give positive feedback and encouragement to the student
- Allow the student to participate in class activities (e.g., group discussions) according to his/her ability and condition, to avoid putting the student under too much pressure
- Adopt diversified teaching activities, such as group discussions, video demonstrations, etc., to facilitate the student's learning
- Break down tasks and highlight key points in terms of teaching strategies
- Provide homework accommodations according to the student's needs to reduce his/her pressure
- Provide special examination arrangements according to the student's needs and suggestions from professionals

Strengthening Support and Home-School Cooperation

- Provide intensive support services to students with serious difficulties as needed, such as formulating an Individual Learning Plan, conducting regular reviews and follow-up
- Maintain close collaboration and communication among the school, parents and professionals (such as healthcare professionals, social workers, psychologists, etc.)

Useful Websites

Education Bureau

Homepage of the Education Bureau

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“SENSE” Integrated Education and Special Education Information Online Information

<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

“Mental Health @School” Student Mental Health Information Online

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education

https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/integrated-education/download-area-and-related-links/ie_guide_en.pdf

Teacher's Resource Handbook on Understanding and Supporting Students
with Mental Illness

[https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's_Resource_Handbook_on_Understanding_and_Supporting_Students_with_Mental_Illness_\(August%202017\).pdf](https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/Teacher's_Resource_Handbook_on_Understanding_and_Supporting_Students_with_Mental_Illness_(August%202017).pdf)

Department of Health

Child Assessment Service

<https://www.dhcas.gov.hk/en/>

Student Health Service

<https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/eindex.html>

Social Welfare Department

<https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/>

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

<https://www.hkcss.org.hk/?lang=en>

Telephone Numbers for Enquiry

Education Bureau

General enquiries about special education 3698 3957

Hospital Authority

Hospital Authority Mental Health Direct (24 hours) 2466 7350

Department of Health

Child Assessment Service 2246 6659

Student Health Service 2349 4212

Community Resources and Helplines

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/early-identification-at-the-selective-level/helplines-and-community-resources.html>