



**Mental health self-help handbook
for youth:**

DEPRESSION

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

The mental health self-help handbook aims to provide youth with information about the most common mental health challenges they face and offer practical help for dealing with said challenges.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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What is depression?

1.1 What is depression as a state and what is a feeling of depression?

Depression is defined as a state of psychological health which has been shown to profoundly affect a person's viewpoint and self-perception, perception of others and the environment in general. Depression is frequently equated with a depressive mood or a term often used by people when they find themselves feeling sad or when they lack the will to conduct their daily tasks and every-day activities. Depression as a state is long-term, whereas depressive mood is something which occurs in every person at a certain period of their life.

As young people progress through a number of growth stages, they inevitably face changes, both physical and mental, that affect their personal and social development.

Adolescence, in itself, as a period of transition from child to young person and young adult, brings some difficulties for young people. During this period they explore and get to know themselves and a new person is built called a young adult with different new responsibilities and desires in life. Thus, a depressive mood can often occur in a young person due to all the above-mentioned changes that occur to them.

Feelings of depression are a common occurrence in young people and teenagers and are something that is part of the overall development of a young person. Young people experience major changes and sometimes feelings of depression occur within normal limits and not classify the young person as a person with depression as a state. When we talk about depressive disorders in young people, we are talking about states that last and that make it difficult for young people to live their every-day life and to grow and develop.



1.2 What are depressive disorders (a depressive state)?

If the symptoms of depression can be classified according to certain medical criteria, then it is a depressive disorder, which is diagnosed by a psychiatrist.

Distinguishing between feelings of sadness and a depressive state

Every young person sometimes feels moderate sadness and depression, but when it is not pertaining to a pathological depression, these feelings should remain within normal limits.

The symptoms that a person who has feelings of depression will be mild and after a short period of time the person will be able to get out of the state without showcasing an inferiority complex or showing other depressive symptoms.

These feelings occur in every young person, and in those who have depression as a state, these feelings and the inability to cope are some of the onsets that lead to the development of the so-called pathological depression.

In other words, depression is a state that lasts for a long time and if:

A person with major depressive disorder becomes very moody and does not enjoy life. He / she loses concentration and energy, and eating and sleeping disorders occur as well. Feelings of guilt are also common. Feelings of hopelessness and despair can make a person think of suicide.



Symptoms and causes

2.1 What are the symptoms of depression?

- Depressive mood,
- Boredom;
- Loss of feelings of satisfaction and interest,
- Fatigue,
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem,
- Unreasonable self-criticism or unfounded feelings of guilt,
- Recurring thoughts of death, suicide or suicidal behavior.

Important Note: It is possible for a person who experiences depression as a state and who has suicidal thoughts to think that every person in life would sometimes have the aforementioned thoughts. This makes it difficult for a person to realize that he or she is facing a difficulty that requires professional support. A mentally healthy person never thinks of suicide as a way out of the problems he or she is facing, but seeks a way to solve them. If you experience suicidal thoughts, please consult a professional.

- Lack of initiative, feelings of indecision or inability to concentrate,
- psychomotor retardation or agitation,
- sleep disorder,
- change in appetite and weight.



2.2 Causes of Depressive Disorders in Young People

Depression as a state can be experienced in different forms and each of them can occur for a variety of reasons.

External factors - this is the case when an individual is mentally healthy, but fails to cope with difficult life events in a healthy manner. These external factors most often include the loss of a loved one, death, separation from parents, divorce of spouses, loss of a loved one and similar external factors.

Life itself brings beautiful things, but also not so beautiful and even painful ones. These things have an impact on the person, but the person needs to find healthy coping mechanisms, for themselves and the environment, in order to overcome it. The period of grief about these unfortunate events lasts a long time, sometimes even for years, and it should last, because that is a normal state of occurrence. But the person after a certain period of time must carry on with his/her life and perform daily activities with a desire for life and progress.

Family patterns and connection - this is the case when the young person is very close to their parents or when the children (young person) and the parents are in a symbiotic relationship or the phase of separation and separation from the parents has not commenced at all. Usually, in such situations, they are too vulnerable in any situation that happens to them as well as in the event of any severance of ties they have with other people. When the reason is the person's connection with their parents, the person cannot and has not learned how to make a decision by himself/herself, has not built boundaries between the decisions made together with the parents and the decisions made by him/her alone and the person has no mechanisms to deal with difficult situations by himself/herself. Therefore, at each specific event in life, they develop long-term feelings of depression and do not know how to get out of them.



This can be the case when people get depressed when they break up with a partner, when they quarrel with a friend or when they get a bad grade at school/college. Usually, in these life situations the person is expected to be sad and disappointed, but following a certain period of time, he/she has to get out of the situation, process everything that happened and move on with life. It is very difficult for people who have depression as a state to move on after this situation and they simply do not see a way out in any other situation.

Genetics or heredity - like all mental disorders, depression can be inherited from a family member.

Biochemical factors

Depressive disorders are thought to be partly due to chemical imbalances in the brain. This imbalance is treated with antidepressants.

The use of alcohol and psychotropic substances

Harmful use of alcohol and other substances makes people very prone to depression. It also increases the risk of suicide in people with depressive disorders.

2.3 Diagnosing depression

Since depression as a state is a pathological disorder, it requires to be diagnosed by a psychiatrist or psychologist who would further refer the person to a psychiatrist. Medication treatment for depression is prescribed by a psychiatrist, while therapeutic treatment is performed by a psychologist or psychotherapist.



One of the tests used to diagnose depression is called the Beck test or Beck's Depression Inventory. This test can be used to diagnose depression. The test consists of 20 questions that the person answers himself/herself. Each question has a certain number of points that are added at the end. Depending on the number of points it is determined whether depression exists and what is the level of depression that the person is experiencing.

Important note for the ones taking the test by themselves without the presence of experts::

If you decide to take the test, keep in mind that you cannot determine that you experience depression as a state, regardless of the result of the test you might get. There are a number of additional conversations and ways for professionals to diagnose depression.

For the test to give true results, it is important to have a professional interviewer who will also conduct a comprehensive conversation about the current activities that the person performs in order to find out whether the reason for the particular score is depression as a state or a momentary stressful event or change. If the test gives you high results, consult a psychologist or psychiatrist to confirm the state.

Sample of the test

1.

0 I do not feel sad

1 I feel sad

2 I'm constantly sad and I can never stop being sad

3 I'm so sad and unhappy that I cannot bear to feel like this anymore



2.

- 0 In general, I am not discouraged about the future
- 1 I feel discouraged about the future
- 2 I feel like there is nothing to be happy about
- 3 I feel that the future is hopeless and that nothing will improve

3.

- 0 I do not feel unsuccessful
- 1 I feel that I have not succeeded in many things, even more than the average person
- 2 As I look back on life, I see many failures
- 3 I feel like a complete failure as a person

4.

- 0 I get as much pleasure from things as I used to before
- 1 I do not enjoy things as I used to in the past
- 2 I no longer get real pleasure from anything
- 3 I'm dissatisfied or bored with everything

5.

- 0 I do not feel particularly guilty about anything
- 1 I feel guilty sometimes
- 2 I feel pretty guilty most of the time
- 3 I feel guilty all the time



6.

- 0 I do not feel that anyone is punishing me for anything
- 1 I feel like I can be punished for something
- 2 I expect to be punished
- 3 I feel punished

7.

- 0 I do not feel disappointed in myself
- 1 I'm disappointed in myself
- 2 I am disgusted with myself
- 3 I hate myself

8.

- 0 I do not feel like I am worse than anyone else
- 1 I am critical of myself for my weaknesses or mistakes
- 2 I always blame myself for my mistakes
- 3 I blame myself for everything bad that happens

9.

- 0 I do not experience thoughts of committing suicide
- 1 I experience thoughts of committing suicide, but I would not commit them
- 2 I would like to kill myself
- 3 I would commit suicide if I had the chance

10.

- 0 I do not cry more than usual
- 1 Now I cry more than I used to
- 2 Now I cry all the time
- 3 I used to be able to cry, but now I cannot even cry, even though I want to



11.

- 0 I'm no more irritated by things than before
- 1 I'm slightly more irritated now than I used to be
- 2 I'm quite annoyed or irritated most of the time
- 3 I feel irritated all the time

12.

- 0 I did not lose interest in other people
- 1 I'm less interested in other people than I used to be
- 2 I lost most of my interest in other people
- 3 I lost all interest in other people

13.

- 0 I make decisions just like I did before
- 1 I procrastinate the decision-making process more than before
- 2 I have more difficulty making decisions than before
- 3 I can no longer make decisions

14.

- 0 I do not feel that I look worse than before
- 1 I'm worried about looking old or unattractive
- 2 I feel that there are permanent changes in my appearance that make me look unattractive
- 3 I believe I look ugly



15.

- 0 I can work as before.
- 1 It takes additional effort on my part to start doing something
- 2 I have to work very hard to do something
- 3 I cannot work at all

16.

- 0 I can sleep as usual
- 1 I do not sleep like before
- 2 I wake up 1-2 hours earlier than usual and find it difficult to fall back to sleep
- 3 I wake up a few hours earlier than before and cannot fall back to sleep

17.

- 0 I do not get tired more than usual
- 1 I get tired easier than before
- 2 I'm tired of doing almost anything
- 3 I'm too tired to do anything

18.

- 0 My appetite is the same as usual
- 1 My appetite is not as good as before
- 2 My appetite is much worse now
- 3 I no longer have an appetite

19.

- 0 I have not lost weight lately
- 1 I lost more than eleven pounds
- 2 I lost more than twenty-two pounds
- 3 I lost more than thirty-three pounds



20.

0 I'm not worried about my health more than usual

1 I'm worried about my physical problems such as pain, upset stomach or constipation

2 I'm very worried about my physical problems and it is hard to think about anything else

3 I'm so worried about my physical problems that I cannot think of anything else

21.

0 I have not noticed a recent change in my interest in sex

1 I am less interested in sex than before

2 I have almost no interest in sex

3 I completely lost interest in sex

Scoring scale

Add the numbers in front of the phrase that suits you. The total sum you get is your score.

1-10 _____ these ups and downs are considered normal

11-16 _____ Mild mood disorder

17-20 _____ Borderline clinical depression

21-30 _____ Moderate depression

31-40 _____ Severe depression

above 40 _____ Extreme depression



Dealing with depression

3.1 How to deal with depression as a state or as a feeling?

If you have been dealing with depression for a long time, and you are not sure if you are experiencing depression as a state or just feelings of depression for some time, visit a psychologist or psychiatrist to determine your condition. Professionals will help you deal with depression.

If you have already been diagnosed with depression by a professional:

- follow the directions given to you and at the same time, practice the bellow-mentioned tips for feelings of depression.

If you experience feelings of depression:

- **Give yourself space** to deal with everything that happens to you and set your expectations according to your capabilities. Improve yourself and what you do day in and day out. If you imagine a scale for something you want to do and change, if the scale ranged from 1 to 10, and you are at level 3, set your expectations that you want to reach level 4, not level 8. And when you reach level 4, set yourself a new expectation that you want to reach level 5. This way you will not be disappointed with yourself, but give yourself enough time to do the things you want in your own way.
- **Talk to friends** you feel close to about how they can help you. Tell them what you want them to do in a given situation. Make a secret sign that only you will know, so that you can give them a sign in a large group of people that you need help at the moment.



Talk to your parents and family about how they can help you. Exercise independence and decision-making regarding your interests, to the level of your abilities (depending on your age). Remind yourself constantly that no matter what your feelings are and their desire to protect you, you still need to build yourself into a person who is able to handle everything that happens to you by yourself.

Get up early in the morning even when you have no obligations, at least around 9 am (unless you were at a club the night before. 😊)

If you cannot fall asleep at night, try natural-based teas, such as chamomile, valerian, lemon balm, etc. that stimulate sleep.

If you are still unable to fall asleep, try breathing with the following method: turn on your left side, close the right nostril with the right thumb while placing the index finger and middle finger between the eyebrows. Breathe lightly from the left nostril, inhale for 4 seconds, then exhale for 4 seconds. Repeat several times. Furthermore, inhale while inhaling for 6 seconds, then exhale while exhaling for 6 seconds. Repeat several times. Furthermore, inhale for 8 seconds, and then exhale for 8 seconds.

Important Note: If you practice yoga and conscious breathing online without an instructor, in depressive states it is not recommended to hold your breath as usual. Yoga and breathing help in such situations, but an instructor who knows your condition helps the most. For a person experiencing depression as a state, the yoga practice is recommended to be practiced in the presence of an instructor, and not in online recorded sessions where there is no person to tell you what to do differently in any of the exercises, asanas, breathing or meditation. Yoga, like all other sciences, is a science and has many good sides, but to practice it properly, especially in a depressed state, for your protection it is necessary to have an instructor with you.



- **Make daily plans about your daily activities** and make sure you follow them. Always include a new thing that you have never experienced or forgotten how to do.

- **Pay attention to yourself and your interests and hobbies**

- **Say positive affirmations to yourself several times a day**, such as: You are great! Bravo! Well done! Keep up the good work! You can do it! It's even better if you say these affirmations in front of a mirror. It may seem strange at first, but you will grow to like it later.

- **Find a motivational sentence that you like** and write it down or put it on the screen of your laptop or phone every day

- **Draw mandalas** (only if you enjoy it). There are a number of mandalas on Google that you can print on a plain sheet of paper.

- **Reduce drug and alcohol use** (both in quantity and in number of days).

If your company consists of young people, who go out often and consume alcohol, and of course you still want to hang out with them, and you are not ready to give up alcohol completely, at least reduce the days of friendship in the moments when alcohol is being consumed. When you drink alcohol, drink water with the drink, 1 glass of wine is coupled with 1 glass of water, 2 glasses of wine are coupled with 2 glasses of water and etc. Do not change your drink, start with one drink and finish with the same (if you drink wine, stay with the wine, remember that the shots will not help you either the next day or during the week). Ask your friends at least one day a week to do some non-alcoholic activity, go to the movies, ride a bike, go to the mountains, ice cream or whatever you may find interesting.



Important Note - If you have been diagnosed with depression as a state and you are currently taking medication (Pills prescribed by a psychiatrist) you should not drink alcohol under any circumstances.

- **At the end of the day, remember a good thing that happened** or something beautiful that you saw or perceived and think about how you could improve one of the things that happened to you that you did not like the most.

3.2 How to help someone who is depressed or has feelings of depression?

Read all of the above and point out some of them to the person in question

Be open to talking to the person and ask how you can help them.

Be open to new kinds of activities you can do together - if you've only been to a disco or a club, do something different and go somewhere else where the person would like you to be together.

Support / suggest the idea of visiting a professional - if the condition is long-term.



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Национален младински совет
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