

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AS A YOUTH LEADER DEPRESSION

### What is depression?

Depression is more than just 'feeling a bit low'. It's a condition where your mood drops for days at a time, meaning you feel sad, flat, and struggle to feel like doing anything much.

Depression affects every part of your life, and you may find you lose your appetite, can't sleep, or that things which you used to find fun just don't do it for you anymore.

There are lots of symptoms and different people will experience different ones, however here's just a few to look out for:

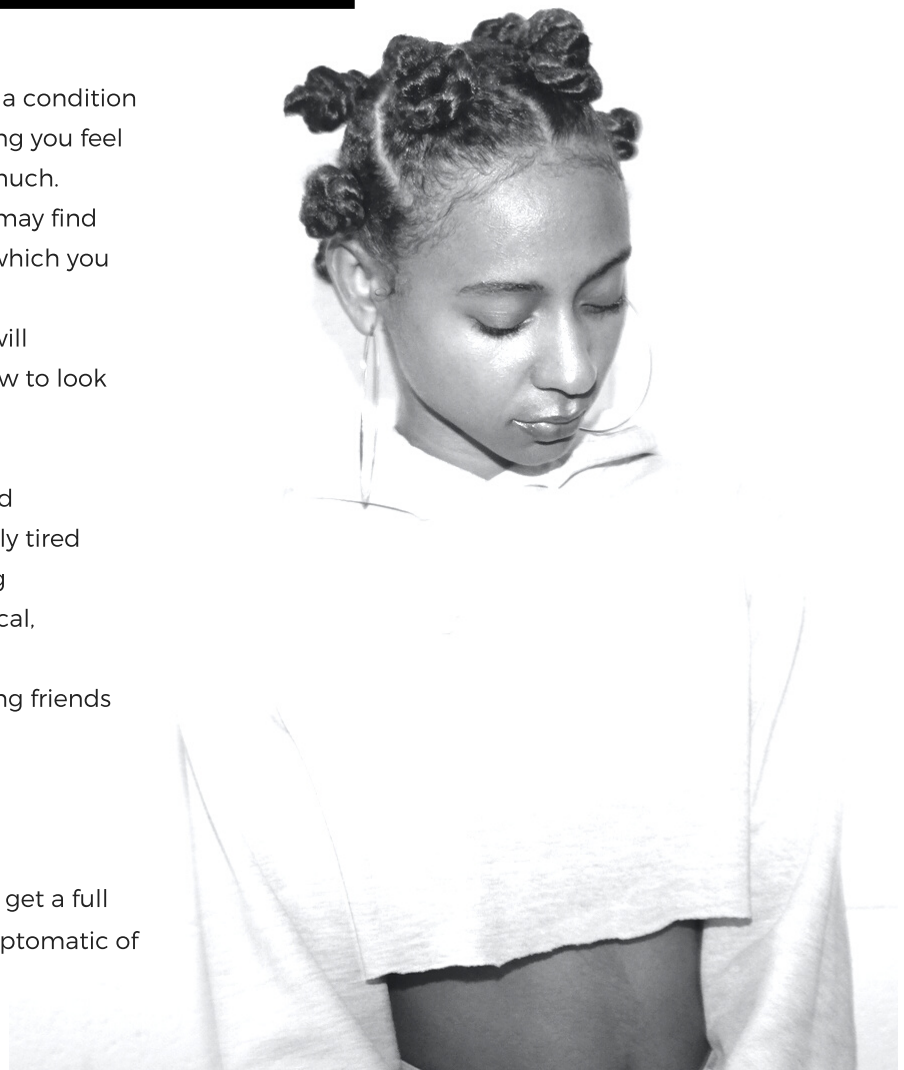
- Not enjoying things that you previously enjoyed
- Feeling lethargic (low on energy) and frequently tired
- Sleeping excessively or having trouble sleeping
- Feeling overwhelmingly sad, irritable, self-critical, hopeless.
- Withdrawing from social situations and avoiding friends
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tearfulness
- Loss of appetite

It's important that a young person talks to a GP to get a full diagnosis as some of these symptoms can be symptomatic of other conditions.

### What causes depression?

Everyone is different, and there are lots of things that can trigger depression. It can be about a one-off event or trauma, or something that comes on more gradually, fed by long-term unhelpful thought patterns. Depression can also have a physical cause or be related to other physical illnesses.

The truth is, many people may never know what caused it - and that can be what feels most difficult. If two people have depression, it's unlikely the cause is the same. Others may have a physical problem, such as a hormone imbalance. Sometimes depression is about a rough period in life or a season when a lot is changing or uncertain. We can become depressed if there's been a lot of pressure for a long time and it's worn us out - when you feel overwhelmed and exhausted sometimes your brain just wants you to hide away so you can rest.



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### Can depression be treated?

Yes :) Depression doesn't go away by just 'pulling yourself together', but usually requires a combination of approaches.

**Talking treatments (or psychotherapies)**- These treatments can help change negative thought patterns, especially CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy), DBT (Dialectical behaviour therapy) and counselling. In these sessions you work through your thoughts, feelings and behaviours with a professional and gain a better understanding of why you feel the way you do. They can then help you put changes in place that help you feel more positive and in control.

**Medication**- Alongside talking treatments, a GP may prescribe antidepressants- these increase the 'feel-good' chemicals in the brain. There are many different types of antidepressant available and depending on your symptoms these can prove really beneficial in lifting the symptoms of severe depression making you feel much better and able to manage emotionally. These medications can carry quite a few side effects so it may take a while to find the prescription that works for you and your GP can then advise you how to decrease the dose when the time is right.

### How can I help- immediate

If you have concerns that a young person you know is depressed, it's important that you try and find support for them immediately. It is much easier for a young person to recover when supported properly- be it by professionals, their family and friends or adults that they trust. Encourage them to visit the GP to get a proper diagnosis and access the medical and talking therapy treatments available to them. A GP can also refer them into CAMHS- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for further support.



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### How can I help- longer term

**Space to talk-** Giving a young person a safe space to talk can be helpful. Try to listen and not to advise (or fix!) just give them the space to feel supported and not judged.

**Learn more-** The more you understand about depression the better support you'll be able to offer so why not take some time out to research the topic a little deeper (there's also some great articles on [mindandsoulfoundation.org](http://mindandsoulfoundation.org) around depression and faith if you are supporting a young person in a faith capacity).

**Encourage a physical activity-** This doesn't need to be high impact activity but getting out in the fresh air can really help improve your mood and lift your feelings. Perhaps you could encourage them to go out for a walk with you to help alleviate some of the symptoms they are experiencing.

**Self-care-** Often when people are experiencing symptoms of depression self-care can fall down their list of priorities. Encourage them to take some time to take care of themselves- maybe have a bath or set time aside to relax or do something they enjoy like watching a film.

**Stay in touch-** Even if the young person you know doesn't feel able to still attend groups or face social situations (a totally normal response), try to drop them a text, post them a card or letter or pop in to see them regularly. Just knowing that others are thinking of you can make such a huge difference.

