



Depression: A Guide for Families/Whānau

What is Depression?

Depression is a **common experience** for people of **all ages** & can make someone feel down, bored, numb, sad & disinterested in life. Like all mental health experiences, depression can be seen on a scale with '*not depressed*' at one end & depression which can be diagnosed by a mental health professional at the other end. In between are all kinds of experiences of being down such as feeling a bit blue or feeling really miserable because something has happened.

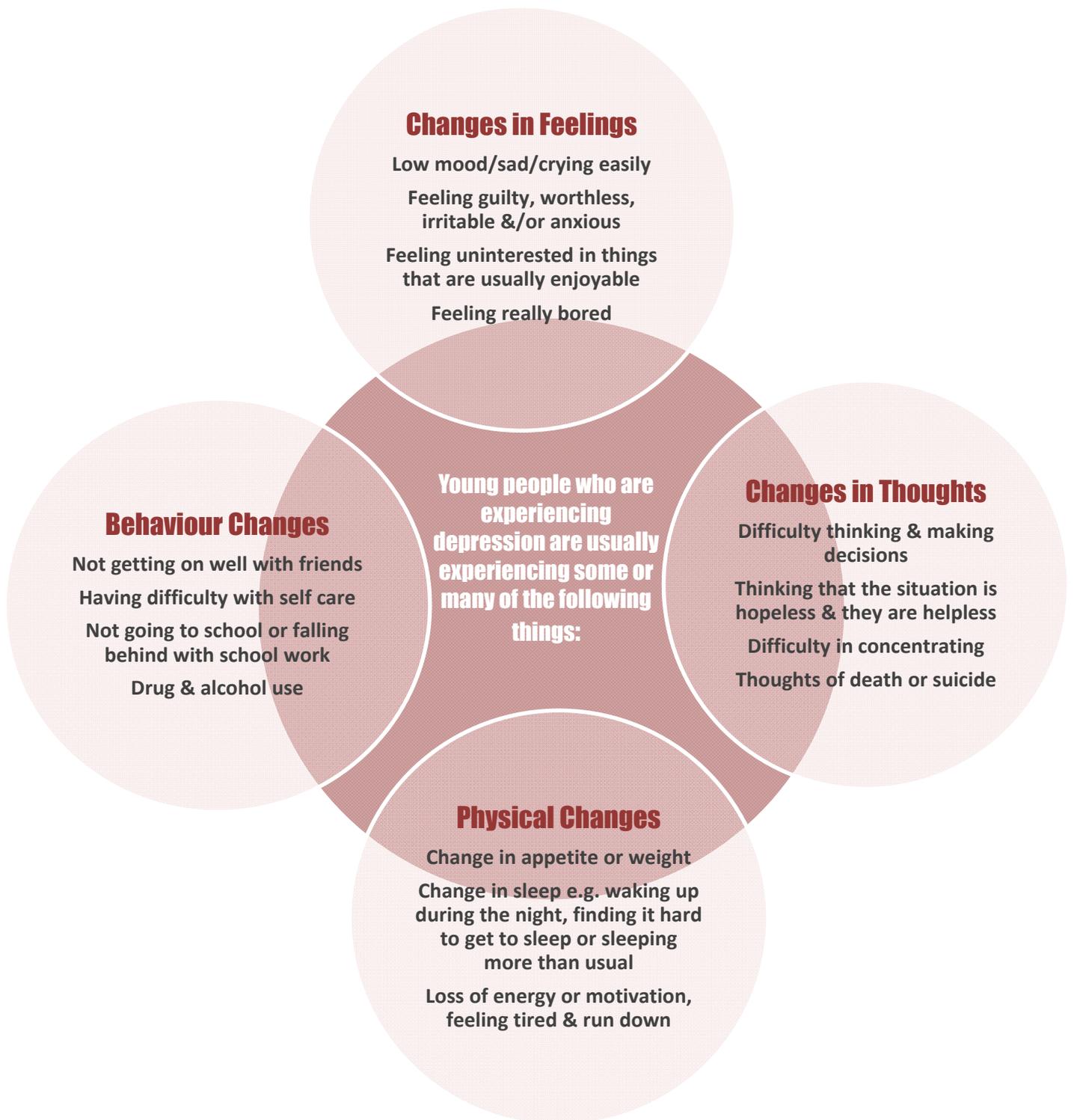
For Depression to be diagnosed, a person's experience of depression needs to have been going on for **more than two weeks**, be causing some of the things listed in the following page & be making everyday living a challenge.

How is depression different in Children & Young people than Adults?

A young person's depression may be **more difficult to recognise** because:

- Children & young people do not always understand their feelings or express them clearly.
- Indicators of depression can be dismissed as "*just growing up*" or as adolescent moodiness.
- There is a strong tie between "*getting into trouble*" & feeling depressed & it can be difficult to work out if the young person is depressed because of being in trouble or in trouble because of being depressed.

What Causes Depression? While no-one knows exactly what **causes** depression, a number of **factors** are thought to be involved. It may develop from a combination of **stressful events & pressures**, **chemical** or **hormonal changes** in the body. Depression can also run **in families**.



So my Child/Young person is Depressed - What now?

The sooner Depression is recognised & treated, the greater the chances of recovery. Sit down & **talk** with your child or young person & suggest that it might help him or her to feel better by getting some **help**. After talking, the **next step** is to visit the **Doctor** or **School Counsellor**. They may refer you & your young person for an **Assessment** at a **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service**.

The two most common ways to **treat** Depression are with **Medication**, **Psychotherapy** or a **combination** of both:

Psychotherapy (Talking Therapy):

There are a number of forms of Psychotherapy, most of which involve **talking** about the issues affecting the young person & then learning **strategies** to overcome them.

This may be recommended to help make your young person's **mood** more **stable**. Antidepressants work by **balancing** the supply of **brain chemicals** (neurotransmitters). They take a **few weeks** to work & often need to be **taken for several months** or longer to help keep depression from returning.

Antidepressant Medication:

All Antidepressants have some **side-effects** & these affect different people to a different extent. Side effects are most likely when medication is started & when doses are altered. Commonly, these include headache, upset tummies & anxiety, which usually pass within days. These are less likely if medication is started at a lower dose & increased slowly. Some people also experience a temporary increase in suicidal thinking (not suicidal behaviour) for a few days or weeks when they start medication, so it is important for them to be well supported & supervised during this period.

Other Treatments:

Family therapy, Counselling & Education Groups have also been found to be **helpful** in addition to the above treatments.

Please make sure you **talk** with your child/young person's **doctor** about any worries or questions regarding medication or psychotherapy. Also, **find out** how you can be an **active** part of the **team** that helps your child/young person with their **recovery**.



Helpful Websites:

A number of **self-help strategies** are also available (on-line & in books) & may also be worth checking out:

www.lowdown.co.nz

www.depression.org.nz

www.mentalhealth.org.nz

www.engagenz.co.nz

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au