

Learning Objectives

- ✿ To be able to identify why someone might be feeling depressed or hopeless, and to recognise the signs that indicate that someone is becoming depressed (knowledge).
- ✿ To learn about some of the ways that students may be able to help someone who is feeling depressed (skills).
- ✿ To appreciate how other people's experiences affect them in different ways (attitudes/values).

Total Time
45 mins
+15mins
extension
activities

Teacher's Notes

- ✿ **Samaritans STRONGLY RECOMMEND that due to the sensitivity of this topic you do not attempt to teach this lesson without having done Lesson 1 – Emotional Health Awareness.**

DEAL Factsheet F2 is on 'Understanding Depression' and can be used as a resource for this lesson.

Ground rules: Please read this statement out at the beginning of the lesson: "In this lesson we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the lesson, you can go to ... (please either give the contact person in the school, for example a school counsellor, or an outside number, for example Samaritans).

Resources

- ✿ Starter exercise cards – Social/psychological/physical factors contributing to depression.
- ✿ Core activity cards – Dealing with depression (1 set).
- ✿ Beach ball or football and pump.
- ✿ [optional - extension activity] – Handout 1: Depression Facts Quiz (enough for each student)
- ✿ [optional] Small bouncy balls (representing hope) – enough for each student.
- ✿ [optional – extension activity] – pile of empty shoeboxes, or carrier bags stuffed with newspaper or inflated balloons.
- ✿ [optional – extension activity] – photocopies of labels to go on boxes or bags.

Introduction - What is depression?

Explain that today's lesson will be about understanding what depression is, about identifying some of the characteristics of depression, and to look at some ways that you might support or help someone if they appeared to be suffering from depression.

Brainstorm- how do you recognise depression?

Draw two columns on the board headed 'Actions' and 'Words'. Ask the class to brainstorm what they think a depressed person may say or do, and make notes in the appropriate columns.

Depression can happen to anyone. It is one of the most common psychological problems, affecting nearly everyone through either personal experience or through depression in a family member. We all have some idea already of what we think depression looks like, but now we are going to think in more detail about some of the things that might cause depression.

Time
5 mins



Starter Exercise: Social, Psychological and Physical Factors that contribute to Depression

Instructions: Introduce the idea of three categories of things that may trigger depression, social, psychological and physical. Briefly explain what is meant by these terms.

Social – anything to do with society at a general level, where you live, or more specifically to do with close relationships with family, friends, work colleagues etc.

Psychological – how you think and feel: anxieties or worries.

Physical – anything to do with your general physical health.

Time
10 mins



Divide into smaller groups. Hand out a set of the 'Causes of Depression' cards to each group. Ask them to arrange the cards into the three categories of Social, Psychological and Physical. [NB for older or more able students you could ask the groups to come up with their own suggestions.]

This list is not comprehensive, and some cards may apply to more than one category. The exercise is intended to start students thinking and to provoke discussion.

Social Factors:

1. recent loss or bereavement
2. too much responsibility
3. lack of family support
4. lack of friends
5. lack of money
6. being bullied

Psychological Factors:

1. experiencing rejection
2. being a perfectionist
3. suffering anxiety
4. lack of self esteem
5. feeling lonely
6. lack of hope

Physical Factors:

1. having glandular fever or other illnesses
2. drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
3. history of depression in the family
4. having undergone serious surgery
5. poor diet
6. drug abuse

If you have time, you could give them blank cards to write their own suggestions on.

Core Activity:**1. Recognising Depression**

Instructions: Read the following description of Tony.

Tony is 16 and in his final term of school. He is worried about finding a job. He never really liked school and he has always messed around in lessons, not concentrating on his work. He is worried that he will end up in a boring job. He regrets all the fooling around and time wasting but he doesn't know what he can do.

10 mins

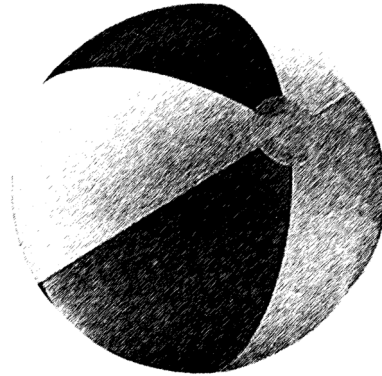
In small groups ask students to draw a large outline of 'Tony' on flipchart paper or wallpaper lining paper. Use this outline to draw or write some of the signs and symptoms of depression.

You could write some ideas on the board if groups are struggling to come up with appropriate suggestions. [NB - this exercise could also be done as a whole group, with the teacher writing down suggestions from students if you are pushed for time, or would like to keep more control of the class.]

Feedback briefly to the rest of the class if activity is run in small groups:

Certain characteristic symptoms, if long lasting, can indicate serious depression. They include:

- ✿ a loss of interest and enjoyment in life
- ✿ a lack of drive and motivation, making even simple tasks difficult
- ✿ fatigue
- ✿ tearfulness or a complete lack of emotion
- ✿ agitation and restlessness or apathy and lethargy
- ✿ loss or gain in appetite or weight
- ✿ sleeplessness or excessive sleeping
- ✿ loss of outward affection
- ✿ loss of self-confidence
- ✿ avoidance of people
- ✿ irritability or erratic mood swings
- ✿ feeling useless, inadequate, hopeless, worthless
- ✿ pre-occupation with real or imaginary aches, pains and illness
- ✿ feeling isolated, lonely, self-reproachful, guilty
- ✿ an increased use of alcohol or drugs
- ✿ poor concentration
- ✿ thoughts of suicide - the idea that "other people would be better off without me".

**2. Dealing with Depression**

Use a beach-ball as a visual aid for this part [you could use a football, but will need a pump to re-inflate it]. The beach-ball, when it is full of air represents how we feel when everything is going well, and we are feeling happy. The ball bounces when you drop it on the floor. When we are feeling well, we have an ability to 'bounce back' when we have small things in the day that don't go too well. However, there are some things in life that 'let the air out' of our beach-ball. These can be big changes such as moving house or school, loss, divorce, separation or death in the family or someone close. Major arguments with friends, serious ill-health, no money, poor relationships – as you describe some of these things, let some of the air out of the ball. When you drop the ball on the floor now, it doesn't bounce back. Explain that depression is like that – it is really difficult to 'bounce back', and to feel well again.

If you notice any of the symptoms of depression in any of your friends or family, here are a few things that you can do. [Give out the cards to different people in the class. Ask them to read out the cards in turn. Every time someone reads out a card, a volunteer should blow into the ball to re-inflate it.]

- ✿ Give emotional support by listening carefully and offering hope.
- ✿ Invite the person to join you in activities that you know he or she used to enjoy.
- ✿ Take comments about suicide seriously, and seek professional advice.
- ✿ Encourage the person to make an appointment with a doctor. Maybe go along for support.
- ✿ Encourage the person not to put off doing important class work. Offer to do it together.
- ✿ Encourage the person to get a good night's sleep of 7 or 8 hours every night.
- ✿ Help the person to plan their day or week to gain a sense of control.
- ✿ If they are given a treatment plan, or medicine from the doctor, encourage them to stick with it as improvement may take several weeks.
- ✿ Encourage the person to try relaxation methods such as deep breathing, walking or other exercise.
- ✿ Encourage the person to take some time every day to do something they enjoy.

After all the cards have been read out, the ball should be fully inflated. Emphasise that recovery from depression can take quite a while, and not to get disheartened, but to remain positive, hopeful and patient. [If you want to give the students something to take away, you could buy them all a small bouncy ball to represent 'hope' – it will serve as a reminder of the lesson, and encourage them not to give up.]

10 mins



Optional Extension Activities

1 Carrying the Load (15 mins)

Ask for a volunteer from the group. Load up the volunteer with as many shoe boxes or balloons as they can carry and then add some more - each shoe box should be labeled with one of the many reasons why someone might be feeling depressed or one of the feelings associated with depression. [If you can't get hold of enough shoe-boxes, you could use carrier bags stuffed with newspaper, or you could use things that are in the classroom, such as a pile of textbooks, or other students' bags or coats.]

Start by saying that when people are trying to help someone who is depressed, there are some common things that people say.

1. Many people will tell someone who is feeling depressed or hopeless not to worry, things will get better.
 - ✿ Ask another student to tell the first volunteer not to worry about their load. Ask the volunteer does that help?
2. Many people will tell someone who is feeling depressed or hopeless to pull themselves together.
 - ✿ Ask the volunteer if they can pull themselves away from the shoe boxes?
3. Sometimes people will tell someone who is feeling depressed to concentrate on their school work or throw themselves into another activity to help them feel better.
 - ✿ Ask the volunteer to concentrate on something else. Does it help?

Go round the group and ask for positive ways in which you might support someone who is feeling depressed. Each time someone makes a suggestion that the volunteer thinks would lighten their load take a shoe box away from them until as many shoe boxes as possible have been removed.

Things to bring out:

- ✿ encourage the person to talk about:
 - their feelings good and bad
 - any painful experiences
 - their fears and hopes
 - any suicidal feelings
- ✿ stay active: exercise, a long walk, normal routine will help
- ✿ doing things that make them feel good about themselves
- ✿ eat a well balanced diet: people with depression often lose weight and run low in vitamins which can make them feel worse
- ✿ resist the temptation to use alcohol or drugs as a support:
 - these may give immediate relief but they are temporary and depression can become worse as a result.

The following are some examples that can be used as 'labels' for the shoe box exercise:

Loss of a limb	Being overweight	Feeling you can never do anything right
Feeling lonely	Feeling no-one cares	Over achieving
Loss of sight	Being underweight	Feeling everyone always expects you to do everything right
Feeling isolated	Feeling no-one takes you seriously	Lack of friends
Loss of hearing	Break up of family	Feeling constantly judged by others
Feeling very anxious or afraid	Feeling you have to have all the answers	Lack of family support
Loss of a pet	Break up of relationship	Feeling totally helpless
Feeling left out	Feeling rejected	
Being bullied	Under achieving	
Feeling put upon		

15 mins
each
activity





OR

2. Fact or Fiction?

Use the Fact or Fiction statements to read out to the class. Students can respond by either raising their hands, moving from one side of the room to the other, or by holding up fact/fiction cards. Read out the parts in bold – the parts in brackets are for further explanation.

- ✦ Depression only happens when something bad goes on in your life, such as a divorce, the death of a loved one, or losing your job. Sometimes depression can happen, even when life is going well. [Depression can be set off by things going wrong in your life, but that isn't always the case. Depression might be associated with a chemical imbalance in the brain.] (False)
- ✦ If you can't snap out of your depression, it means you're weak. (False)
- ✦ Depression means that you have something wrong with your character. [It doesn't mean you aren't strong enough emotionally. It's a real medical condition, like diabetes or arthritis.] (False)
- ✦ If you wait it out, your depression will always go away. [If you're suffering from depression, it might not just go away. For some people, if it isn't treated, their depression can last months, or even years.] (False)
- ✦ Only suicidal people need antidepressants. [Antidepressants are not just for people who think about suicide. Antidepressants might help people who are depressed feel better.] (False)

QUIZ User the Quiz on Worksheet 1 to allow the students to think more about what depression is.

15 mins



Reflect and Discuss

- ✦ Draw together all the lessons learned today about understanding and handling depression.
- ✦ Use the ball to throw to students and ask them questions such as 'give me one symptom of depression, give me one social / psychological / physical trigger for depression, one way of helping someone with depression'. After they have answered they throw the ball back to the teacher, and the teacher throws it to someone else.

5 mins

Summary

Closing discussion and feedback.

Everyone can feel low at times, low feelings can often relate to something that has happened such as a loss, bereavement, break-up of a relationship, or a stressful event. Normally we will work through our feelings about what has happened and come to terms with it over time. For some people the cause of their depression may not be so obvious or the level of their depression may seem out of proportion to the event that appears to have triggered it. If we, or anyone we are close to find themselves feeling depressed or hopeless we need to think about what we might do to help either ourselves or others.

- ✦ Ensure that students know where to go for help if they want to talk further about depression, or about any issues in their life that may be causing them concern at the moment.

5 mins

Starter Activity: Understanding and Handling Depression - Social, Psychological and Physical Factors

Photocopy and cut out 3 sets of cards.

Recent loss or bereavement	Lack of money	Having glandular fever or other illnesses
Too much responsibility	Being bullied	Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
Experiencing rejection	Suffering anxiety	History of depression in the family
Lack of family support	Lack of self esteem	Recent serious surgery
Lack of friends	Feeling lonely	Poor diet
Being a perfectionist	Lack of hope	Drug abuse

Core Activity 2: Understanding and Handling Depression - Dealing with Depression

Photocopy and cut out 1 set of cards.

Invite the person to join you in activities that you know he or she used to enjoy.	Help the person to plan their day or week to gain a sense of control.
Take comments about suicide seriously, and seek professional advice.	If they are given a treatment plan, or medicine from the doctor, encourage them to stick with it as improvement may take several weeks.
Encourage the person to make an appointment with a doctor. Maybe go along for support.	Encourage the person to try relaxation methods such as deep breathing, walking or other exercise.
Encourage the person not to put off doing important class work. Offer to do it together.	Encourage the person to take some time every day to do something they enjoy.
Encourage the person to get a good night's sleep of 7 or 8 hours every night.	

Handout 1: Depression Facts Quiz

Circle the letter corresponding to the answer that you think is correct.

1. Which one best describes depression?

- A:** A 'blue' feeling
- B:** An illness that affects the entire body, not just the mind
- C:** A sign of a weak personality
- D:** A good reason to avoid people, go into your room and lock the door

2. Depression only affects:

- A:** Teens
- B:** Adults
- C:** The elderly
- D:** All of the above

3. Some symptoms of depression include:

- A:** Sadness, sleep problems, lack of pleasure, increase of drugs or alcohol, fatigue
- B:** Difficulty concentrating, restlessness, guilt
- C:** Both of the above
- D:** Giggling and excessive energy

4. What is bipolar depression?

- A:** Depression that does not affect teenagers
- B:** A more common disorder characterised by frequent bouts of depression
- C:** A less common disorder characterised by cycles of depression and 'highs' (mania)
- D:** Depression that only occurs at certain times of the year

5. If a friend tells you that he/she is depressed, you should:

- A:** Help them get treatment. Encourage them to talk and find professional help
- B:** Don't talk to them about it, that will only make it worse
- C:** Leave them alone and give them some time to think
- D:** Tell them it is normal, everyone gets it, and it will go away soon

6. Treatments for depression may include:

- A:** Medication
- B:** A support group
- C:** Counseling and/ or therapy sessions
- D:** All of the above

7. Any talk of suicide should be taken seriously.

- A:** True
- B:** False

8. Emotional swings are normal for teens, so this can make it hard to recognize depression.

- A:** True
- B:** False

9. Teens who claim to be depressed are weak and just need to pull themselves together. There's nothing anyone else can do to help.

- A:** Totally not true
- B:** Totally true

http://www.coolnurse.com/depression_active_quiz.htm