

# WHAT IS DEPRESSION?



**20 minutes**

Create a safe and positive learning environment by agreeing ground rules for the lesson.

## In this lesson we will learn:

- ➔ to recognise when we need to ask for support
- ➔ to recognise when others need support
- ➔ to understand what depression is.

## Resources

- 🕒 shoe boxes or balloons.

This session can be used as a starter for 'Talking about depression' or 'Finding a way forward'.

## Activity

1. 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 labelled with one of the many symptoms or 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 bags and coats.
2. Start by saying that when people are trying to help someone who is depressed, there are some common things that people say. Many people will tell someone who is feeling depressed or hopeless not to worry, things will get better.
3. Ask another student to tell the first volunteer not to worry about their load. Ask the volunteer does that help? Can they pull themselves away from the shoe boxes?
4. 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? It might temporarily but does not help depression in the longer term.
5. Go round the group and ask for positive ways you could support someone who is feeling depressed. Each time someone makes a suggestion that will lighten the load, take a shoe box away until as many shoe boxes as possible have been removed.

Emphasise that this does not mean the person does not have depression anymore. Depression is an illness and takes time to feel better, but there are things you can do to help someone and let someone know you are there for them.



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## Things that could help someone who is struggling

- Asking the person if there is anything you can do to help.
- Offer support by listening carefully and offering to be there for them
- 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 work. Offer to do it together.
- Encourage the person to get a good seven or eight hours sleep 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.

## Here are some examples that can be used as 'labels' for the shoe box exercise

- loss of a special possession
- feeling lonely
- can't have fun with my friends
- feeling isolated
- moving house
- feeling anxious or afraid
- feel sad all of the time
- feeling left out
- being bullied
- feeling put upon
- can't sleep
- feeling no-one cares
- can't get out of bed
- feeling no-one takes you seriously
- parents are arguing
- break up of a relationship
- feeling rejected
- under-achieving
- feeling you can never do anything right
- the pressure to always do well
- lack of friends
- feeling constantly judged by others
- lack of family support
- feeling totally helpless

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**Links to:** Supporting friends | Barriers to seeking help | My support network | Coping with changes | Developing listening skills

**Make sure young people know what support is available and how to access this support.**

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