# cid:image005.png@01CEE05F.758098C0

A depression self-help pack for parents



Shifting Sands: tackling depression one step at a time

Welcome to our depression self-help pack for parents

We have put together this pack to help parents who have children struggling with depression. If you are reading this then you will have noticed that your child is struggling. You might find it difficult to know or understand what is happening for them at the moment, you might find yourself feeling lost and confused, and you are unsure what to do for the best. This pack explains more about depression; its symptoms and causes, and how to make sense of depression. This pack also offers lots of advice and support for what you can do as a parent and how you can support your child to make changes which will have a positive effect on the depression.

Your child will have received a teenager version of this pack. They have all the information and tools set out in this pack. They may choose to do some of this on their own. That is ok. The most important thing is that they are trying to make changes. They may need you to understand that they want to do this on their own, so try to give them that space. Other young people may need more help and may want you to help them put into place the suggestions laid out in this pack. Try to support them to do this rather than do it for them, this is often a more effective way of learning. In the teenage pack we have encouraged young people to talk to their parents and to let them know that they are trying, without having to go into great detail about the depression.

There are several different ways you could approach this pack. You might find it helpful to read through everything and then pick out what you are going to change first and then give it a go, and then choose the second, third, fourth etc. Or you might find it helpful to go straight to the section that you are most interested in, read it, and give those ideas a go. You can do the thing that is most helpful for you.

How the pack is laid out

Part 1 explores “what is depression?” and looks at the symptoms of depression, the causes of depression, and putting this together in a diagram to look at what keeps depression going.

Part 2 explores things you can do to help and support you child, focusing on key topics; sleep, exercise, healthy eating, relaxation exercises and changing negative thinking.

Part 3 explores self-harm and suicide. This section looks at why people want to hurt or kill themselves and things you can do to keep your child safe

#### Contents

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What is depression? | 4 |
| What causes Depression? | 5 |
| Understanding Depression | 6 |
| What can I do to help and support my child? | 7 |
| Sleep | 9 |
| Increase Exercise | 11 |
| Healthy Eating | 15 |
| Relaxation | 18 |
| Challenge Negative Thinking | 22 |
| Self-Harm | 23 |
| Suicide | 26 |
| What if you need your own help | 28 |
| What next? | 28 |

# Part 1: What is Depression?

### What is it?

Experiencing a range of emotions is part of everyday life, and we all feel happy and sad at times. Sometimes feeling sad is appropriate in the situation, and it is ok for everyone to feel sad at times. Most young people will feel sad, upset or fed up as a reaction to things they are experiencing. However, sometimes these feelings can go on for longer periods of time, and those feelings of sadness can affect their everyday lives and interfere with them doing things they would normally do.

Although it can be very difficult for you and your child, Depression is a very common problem for young people; 1% of under-12’s and 3-5% of teenagers experience depression at some point. This means that you and your child are not alone in facing this difficulty.

#### symptoms that your child may be experiencing

There are a wide range of symptoms your child may be experiencing as part of the depression. They may experience some of the following:

Emotions or Feelings:

* Feeling sad, guilty, upset, numb, empty or despairing.
* Losing interest and/or enjoyment in things.
* Crying a lot or feeling unable to cry.
* Feeling alone even if they are in company.
* Feeling irritable and angry, snapping easily.

Physical or bodily signs:

* Tiredness
* Lack of energy
* Restlessness
* Sleep problems
* Slowness
* Feeling worse at a particular time of day (usually morning).
* Changes in appetite, eating and weight.

Thoughts:

* Losing self-confidence
* Expecting the worst and having negative or gloomy thoughts
* Thinking that everything seems hopeless
* That things are their fault
* Thoughts of suicide
* Thinking they hate themselves
* Poor memory or concentration.

They may lose their motivation to do things which means:

* They may find it difficult to do even simple things.
* They stop doing their normal activities
* They cut themselves off from other people
* They may become inactive, just doing nothing for long periods of time.

# 

# What causes depression?

It is difficult to say why someone gets depressed as everybody is different, and there is no one specific cause for depression. Sometimes the reason may be obvious, sometimes it might not be clear. It is usually a mixture of things, for example:

* Something difficult happening
  + Parents getting a divorce
  + Difficult relationships in the home
  + The death of a loved one
  + Abuse
  + Bullying
  + Physical illness
* Being under a lot of stress and having no one to share your worries with
* It can run in families
* There are links to the chemicals in the brain which control mood, these can change in depression

# Understanding Depression

The way you think about things affects the way you feel, which affects the way you behave. It is difficult to directly change the way that you feel. However, you can change the way that you think and your behaviours, which will have a positive impact on the way you feel.

Here is an example of the model that is used in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

**Triggers and Context**

*What led to the difficulties? What is keeping it going?*

E.g Bullied at school. Making mistakes in school work. Having arguments with friends.

Things that happen to us effects how we think

How we think about ourselves effects what we do. What we do effects how we think.

**Thoughts**

*What unhelpful thoughts am I experiencing?*

E.g Nobody likes me. Why can’t I get this right? Why me? I must have done something really wrong to deserve this. Mum and Dad will be so mad.

Negative thoughts lead to negative feelings

**Feelings**

*What are the main emotions I am experiencing?*

E.g Sad. Lonely. Frustrated. Embarrassed.

**Behaviours**

*How do I behave when I am feeling low?*

E.g Say I’m sick so I don’t have to go to school. Cry when I get stuck with my homework. Stop seeing my friend outside school so we don’t argue. Can’t sleep – thinking too much.

How we feel in our bodies effects what we do

How we feel emotionally effects how we feel in our bodies

**Physical Signs**

*What bodily sensations do I feel?*

E.g Sick in my stomach. Tired. Don’t want to eat.

# C:\Users\smithsi\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\7IFLA1SQ\MP900422532[1].jpgPart 2: What can I do to help and support my child?

When your child becomes irritable, does something risky, or locks themselves in their room, it is common to feel angry, upset or anxious. It is important to try to remain calm in these situations as it will help you both in being able to talk about the situation.

Spending time together and showing that you care by listening sympathetically can help.

For young children it can help to give them a space to talk about their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It can help to ask clear questions and give them examples of what you mean.

For older children they might not want to talk at first. Let them know you are there for them. It might help to send them a text or email. That way you have said what you needed to, they have the message, and you won’t be seen as “nagging” or “pestering” them.

Try to increase time doing things together such as cooking, eating as a family, going for a walk, or watching a film or TV.

Try not to blame them for how they are feeling. It might be hard for you to understand why they are feeling depressed or why this has happened, that is ok, your child is probably struggling to understand how they are feeling too. Try to be patient with them. They may find it incredibly difficult to put into words how they are feeling. This is both part of being a teenager with a brain that is still developing, and a teenager struggling with depression.

This is likely to be a stressful and difficult time for you and your child. Make sure they know that you love them no matter what. It might be obvious to you, but the depression may make it hard for them to see that, a kind word or a hug can be very reassuring. Praise them when they do well, highlight what positive qualities they have shown in doing this, and how pleased you are.

Be clear and consistent about what is and isn’t acceptable. Stick to the rules you have set and tell them exactly what it is you would like them to do. Try to remain calm in difficult situations. Remind them of the rules and follow through on what you say. This means thinking of reasonable and realistic consequences which fit the behaviour in question.

Ask your child what they think would help – they often have good ideas about solving their own problems

It is important that you remember to look after yourself. Don’t blame yourself, just because your child has depression it does not automatically make you a bad parent. If the problems that your child is having are also affecting you, it is important to recognise this. It might help to talk to someone that you trust. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from those around you. Try to find a little “me-time” in your week, or a little something for yourself, such as watching your favourite film or seeing a friend. You can also get support for yourself, you can ask your GP to refer you to talking therapies.

### As well as trying to understand and support your child in general, there are some specific areas of support:

1. Sleep
2. Exercise
3. Healthy diet
4. Relaxation
5. Challenge negative thinking

By making improvements in sleep, exercise and diet, research has shown that this it is just as effective in helping individuals with mild depression as antidepressants and therapy. Everything in this packed is linked to evidence-based treatment strategies for depression.

In helping your child with these areas think about balancing being supportive and helpful with allowing them to be independent and come up with ideas and make decisions themselves. The information here mirrors the information in the teenagers self-help pack. Hopefully this will allow for joint conversations between the both of you. However, of course they may want to do some of these things on their own. That is ok too. You might notice that they are making some positive changes and you might be able to comment on what they have managed to achieve by themselves.

# Sleep

Depression often disrupts sleep for example difficulty getting to sleep, difficulty getting up or waking early. Making changes to your child’s sleep can help improve their mood.

On average children age 5 to 12 need between 10 and 11 hours sleep a night. Teenagers need between 9 and 10 hours sleep. Of course there are differences in how much each individual needs. Think about how you might help your child to get the right quantity of sleep as well as good quality sleep.

###### Did you know:

* The light and flicker from TVs/computer screens/ laptops/ iPads/ smartphone screens draw our attention and can make it harder to get to sleep.
* Exposure to natural light helps keep the body clock regular
* Exercise can help to give you energy in the day and sleep better at night
* Staying up late and sleeping in does not give the same quality of sleep as going to bed early and getting up early
* Drinks with caffeine and sugar in can keep you awake and make it difficult to sleep. Drinks which have caffeine in include; tea, coffee, coke, hot chocolate. Certain foods also contain caffeine as well, chocolate, especially dark chocolate contains caffeine.
* Your bedroom environment affects your sleep – extremes of temperature, light, and noises all effect sleep.
* Our brains are always working hard to solve problems, even when we are trying to sleep.

#### Helping young children sleep

* Decide on regular times for going to bed and getting up and stick to these times.
* Develop a consistent bed time routine. Use the hour before bed to help your child “wind down” and prepare for sleep. This could include a bath followed by a bedtime story before you say goodnight.
* If your child cries out in the night it is important to check they are not ill, in pain or wet. Try to do this quickly, whilst being comforting and reassuring. To not to spend too much time with them or take them into your bed. Allow them to settle and fall asleep again on their own.

#### Helping teenagers sleep

* Agree with them regular times for going to bed during the week and at weekends. Agree with them how much of a lie-in is reasonable at the weekends. Try to limit this to 1-2 hours as this will ensure they remain in a stable sleep routine.
* Help them have a “wind down” for up to an hour before bed. This means quiet and relaxing activities such as reading or listening to music. Try to encourage them to not do their homework or be on their laptop at this time. Try to encourage them to turn off the TV – although this can be relaxing for many of us, the flickering screen is not so helpful.
* They should avoid daytime napping. If they are tired encourage them to either do something relaxing, or do something which will energize them, for example getting some fresh air, or being active.
* They should avoid caffeine for four hours before they go to bed. Try to provide alternatives for them, for example squash or flavoured water instead of fizzy drinks, fruit or herbal teas instead of tea and coffee, and malt drinks such as Horlicks instead of hot chocolate (which contains caffeine and sugar).
* Encourage them to exercise in the day and be more active. This will help them sleep better.
* If they are feeling anxious get them to write their worries down, or create a to do list if they are feeling stressed by their workload.

# Increasing exercise

Depression affects our energy levels and our activity levels. Exercise increases our “feel good” hormones, gives you more energy, and combats the low activity levels in depression.

Research has shown that regular exercise is good for our mental health. In fact for mild depression exercise is just as effective as antidepressants and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for changing your mood! This is because the same chemical that is in the antidepressants is released naturally when we exercise.

When you are feeling tired and down exercise can help break the cycle. Think back to our diagram earlier.

Change your behaviour. Change your feelings

Thoughts

Feelings

Behaviour

Change how your body feels. Change your thoughts and feelings.

Physical signs

By encouraging your child to be physically active you will be helping them to break this cycle and improve their mood

Help your child to aim for 30-60 minutes worth of exercise approximately three times a week. It might help to do some exercise together; this might help with the practical elements of getting them to do exercise as well as showing them the benefits of exercise first hand.

Help set your child (and yourself) small realistic targets at first. It is better to do a little every day, rather than aiming for something and then never achieving it. If will help if they think about what they like, and then plan when they are going to do it and stick to it. If they make plans think about what help you might need to give them, for example the practical support of driving them somewhere, financial support in paying for a club. Think first about how you might do this and then discuss this with them. Part of the suggestion for getting started with exercise is that they give themselves a small reward, such as a cup of tea and biscuit with their favourite TV show. You might also reward them by commenting on how well they are doing and how they are achieving a balance in their life.

Another suggestion is to try to build in physical activity every day, such as walking to school or making sure you take the stairs instead of the lift/escalator. Are there times that you could do this as a family? Are there other things you could do to increase your walking time, for example parking at the back of the car park, or getting off the bus a stop early?

Finding it difficult to think about what to do? Here are some ideas that have been suggested:

* Go for a walk. It’s easy and cheap to do. Is there somewhere nice you could walk such as the local park? Or perhaps a walk around the block going down the road with the nicest gardens. Getting fresh air and exercise can help beat the lethargy associated with depression.
* Try yoga or pilates. A gentle form of exercise which also teaches breathing exercises. Look out for classes at your local gym or community centre. Alternatively you could teach yourself at home with either a book, DVD, or on Youtube. However, do not to push yourself with a position you aren’t comfortable with as this will cause pain. Take things slowly at first and build up to moves and stretches. For some examples take a look at  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tklllKHDkIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tklllKHDkIE)   
   [www.youtube.com/watch?v=obLEZDOrRRk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obLEZDOrRRk)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xctBhj7TVc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xctBhj7TVc).

* Swimming is an exercise you take at your own pace, try to aim for a number of lengths and then build up slowly, or aim for a set length in the pool.
* Team spots can be fun due to the socializing element. There might be clubs in your local area or in your school or college. Have a look at what interests you the most and then make the commitment to give it a try.
* You could use a fitness DVD at home. Make sure you choose one that suits your current fitness level – there are some which have shorter workouts to choose from. You could see if your local library has any DVDs you could borrow.
* Go for a cycle ride, you can take it at your own pace and explore the area.
* You could put on your favourite tracks and dance around your room. Why not try lots of up-tempo tracks to really get you moving!
* Grab a pair of trainers and go for a jog or run. You can run around your local park or green space or run along the roads in your neighbourhood. If you are running in the dark make sure that you are safe; remember to look out for cars (especially if you have headphones in) and try to wear light colours as this also helps with visibility. Why not see if you can go running with a friend? Some people find this helps with their motivation.
* Bouncing on a trampoline or a trampette is a fun way to exercise. You can look online for trampette exercises to do to give your workout a boost.
* Look on line for some exercise you can do at home. NHS choices have a series of 10 minute workouts as well as warm up and cool down routines all designed to do at home. Look at [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/home-cardio-workout.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/home-cardio-workout.aspx) for the first in the series and then simply follow the other links at the bottom of the page.

Encourage your child to make a plan for the week. Encourage them to get a balance between things they need to do and things they like to do. Encourage them to be active every day.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
| What I plan to do *e.g*. *Go for a 30 minute walk around the block* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| When I plan to do it  e.g. *4pm, just after getting home from school* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| How did it go?  e.g. *It was a bit cold so I walked faster and was only out for 20 minutes. Felt better afterwards and ready to do my homework* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# C:\Users\smithsi\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\HV31RJYY\MP900403402[1].jpgHealthy Diet

*Poor food choices and irregular eating habits can contribute to mood swings and intensify depression. Choosing healthier foods and paying attention to eating routines can make a significant difference in steadying mood.*

Depression often has an effect on appetite. When depressed you may not have much of an appetite and so eat less. Often food choices are poor due to the lack of motivation to prepare food and perhaps the easy or comforting choice of “junk food”.

Making small, steady changes in eating habits is important for general health and will also help to improve your child’s mood.

As a teenager a lot of their food choices can be influenced by what you buy at the supermarket and what you cook for dinner. It might help to make these changes as a family, not only will it be beneficial for the whole family, but it avoids singling someone out.

Think about how you can get your child involved in food and meal times. Could they help you with the weekly shop? To avoid arguments try planning ahead by making a menu plan for the week and then making the shopping list from that menu. Explain that you will be sticking to what is on your list; this might help control how much expensive “junk food” is added to the trolley.

Could your child help you in the kitchen? Think about what would be appropriate for the age and cooking skills, a 13 year old will be able to help you in a very different way to a 17 year old. For example, could they help you get out all the ingredients for a recipe? Could they read the steps out if you are trying a new recipe? Could they chop some vegetables, or perhaps they could stir?

What do family meal times look like in your house? Every household is different. You may not have a dining room table and instead eat off trays in the living room. Your children may take their food and eat in the bedrooms. You might all eat and different times. You might all eat at the table together. Think about how you would like mealtimes to be and think about what steps you would need to take to achieve this. How could your children help you with this? They often have lots of good ideas!

Try to get them to eat regular meals, especially breakfast. This will help stabilize blood sugar levels which will help stabilize mood and energy levels. The ideal pattern is to eat breakfast, midmorning snack, lunch, late afternoon snack, dinner and late night snack.

Try to get a balanced diet including fruit and vegetables and carbohydrates, for example pasta, bread, potatoes. These foods release their energy slowly and may help to boost certain chemicals in the brain which are lower when we are depressed.

Eating large amounts of sugar and refined food has been shown in some cases to increase irritability. You may want to cut back on the amount of sweet things your child eats, of course a sweet treat is ok from time to time! Try to provide alternatives, ideas for snacks include a handful of nuts and raisins, peanut butter on wholemeal bread, or fruit with seeds or yoghurt.

Ensuring that your child is drinking enough water throughout the day, encourage them to drink when they are thirsty. Be aware that fizzy drinks contain a high amount of sugar and caffeine, try making healthier choices such as water or flavoured water. Milk and fruit juice also count, and are also part of a balanced diet providing calcium and vitamins.

Your child has been encouraged to try keeping a record of what they eat in a week, this will help them see if they are achieving a healthy balance over the course of a week.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
| Breakfast  e.g. Weetabix with raisins |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Snack  e.g. yoghurt |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lunch  e.g. Sandwich, fruit juice, apple |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Snack  e.g. handful of grapes |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dinner  e.g. spaghetti Bolognese |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Snack  e.g. cream cheese and cracker |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Relaxation

Depression feeds off stress. Managing our stress better is one of the key things we can do to keep depression at bay. And the foundation for managing stress levels is knowing how to relax.

This section mirrors the relaxation section in the teenager self-help pack. The exercises here are exactly the same. Relaxation may be something that your child prefers to do on their own. However, other parents have said that they do enjoy doing the relaxation with their child. Perhaps you could talk together about finding a time and a place that you could practice these techniques together. Your child may not want to do the relaxation with you that is ok; relaxation is quite an individual experience. Even if they prefer to do this on their own, this does not stop you from giving it a go! You might find it helpful to practice these exercises so that you have a better understanding of what your child is doing. Additionally you might want to practice these exercises in order to help you manage your own stress; work, family, and having a teenager struggling with depression, the stress can build up quite quickly!

# C:\Users\smithsi\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\48BVZ8CJ\MC900441162[1].jpgBreathing Exercise

We’ll start with a breathing exercise which can be done in a few seconds, no matter where you are.  It is helpful to practice this when you are feeling relaxed and calm. Try to find time to practice this on a regular basis. By practicing it when you are feeling relaxed and calm you can get used to the technique. This will then help you use it in stressful situations.

1. *Take a deep, slow breath in for 4 seconds, hold, and breathe out for 4 seconds. These times are a guide. As you practice start to find your own natural soothing rhythm.*
2. *When you breathe in through nose fill your tummy with air and make it expand. When you breathe out push the air out of your mouth and watch your tummy go down again. Some people find it helpful to imagine their stomach is like a balloon. If fills up and gets bigger with air, and it gets smaller again as it deflates.*
3. *Continue to breathe in and out slowly. Make every breath slow and steady and the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling all the air in your lungs. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.*
4. *Spend a few minutes focusing on your breathing in order to find your soothing rhythm.*
5. *Notice your thoughts and return to focusing on your breathing. It is ok that your mind wonders, just notice those thoughts, and return to focusing on your breathing.*

To help you with this have a look on YouTube for some videos. For example take a look at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExvXmsr--Mk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExvXmsr--Mk) it also uses a count of 4 for the in breath and 4 for the out breath.

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Start by finding a quiet, warm, comfortable space.

During this exercise remember to breath in deeply, hold the position for a count of five, then relax and breathe out slowly saying the word “relax” in your mind. Each exercise should be done twice, leaving 10 seconds pause before doing it for the second time.

Notice the difference in tension before and after each exercise.

1. Push your forearms firmly down onto the floor or arms of the chair. Hold for five seconds and relax…
2. Clench your fists, hold and relax…
3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and make a muscle with both arms, hold and relax…
4. Tighten your forehead and eyebrows, hold and relax…
5. Wrinkle your nose and cheeks, hold and relax…
6. Clench your teeth, hold and relax…
7. Do an exaggerated shrug of your shoulders, hold and relax…
8. Tighten your stomach muscles, hold and relax…
9. Press your heels firmly into the floor, hold and relax…
10. Lift your legs slightly off the ground, hold and relax…
11. Point your toes away from you, hold and relax…
12. Curl your feet and toes, hold and relax…
13. Notice how relaxed your whole body feels. Stay where you are and enjoy the feeling of relaxation for five minutes.

You can look on Youtube to take you through this. For a similar method try [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFwCKKa--18](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFwCKKa--18). Of course you can have a look at other videos. Find one which you find helpful and relaxing.

# Relaxing Imagery

1. Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe.  It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamt about going to, or maybe somewhere you've seen a picture of. For example it may be a shaded forest, a beach on a warm sunny day, or sitting by a fire.
2. Next we are going to work through four of our body senses to help our imaginations create a safe place in your mind.
3. Focus first on where you are, what are your surroundings like? Notice what you can see around you. Notice the colours in your peaceful safe place. For example, the colours of the leaves on the trees, the colour of the sea, or the colour of the flickering fire.
4. Now notice the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence. For example, the wind in the trees, or waves on the shore, or the crackling logs in the fire.
5. Think about any smells you notice there. For example, the mulch of the forest floor, the saltiness of the sea air, the smoke of the fire.
6. Then focus on any skin sensations - the earth beneath you, the temperature, any movement of air, anything else you can touch.
7. Now whilst you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
8. You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now.

Challenge Negative Thinking

In the teenager self-help pack, your child has been encouraged to challenge their negative thinking.

When someone is experiencing depression they often tend to think and expect the worst of themselves, their life and the future. Don’t just accept these thoughts, try to:

1. Identify when you mood is low
2. Jot down the thoughts you are having during that time
3. Which thoughts are positive (+) and which are negative (-)
4. Imagine what would you say to your friend if they had each of these thoughts about themselves
5. How about saying this to yourself
6. Write down one good thing that happened to you each day. If this is difficult ask someone close to you to help.

You can write these ideas down in a thought record. Have a look at our example and give it a try.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **When were you feeling low?** | **What were you thinking about at this time?** | **For each thought, identify whether they were positive or negative** | **For each thought think about what you would say to a friend if they had these thoughts** | **How do you feel after saying those things to yourself?** |
| *Monday evening* | *I got a bad mark in my test today,*  *I’m so stupid,*  *Everybody else could do it why couldn’t I?* | *Negative*  *Negative*  *negative* | *I would say “it’s only one test” “you’ve done well in other subjects” “one bad mark doesn’t make you stupid”* | *I am still disappointed by my mark but I don’t feel as angry with myself.* |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Part 3: Your child wants to hurt themselves

## Self-Harm

Self-harm refers to actions someone takes in order to intentionally hurt or injure themselves, common examples include cutting, scratching, burning, hitting yourself, or taking overdoses.

### Why do people self-harm?

People self-harm for a number of reasons. It can be a way of dealing with difficult emotions. It can help someone feel more in control in difficult situations. It can be a way of taking out anger on yourself. Some people self-harm to punish themselves. Depression can make people feel numb, self-harm can make them feel more connected to what is happening.

Many people deliberately harm themselves and are unhappy about it. People may self-harm by cutting, burning, punching or hurting themselves in some way. People who self-harm often feel distressed a lot of the time. Many people say they self-harm in order to get rid of these difficult feelings. However there are many reasons as to why people self-harm.

To manage moods or feelings

* To escape from emptiness, depression, shame or unreality.
* To relieve tensions, pressure or anger.
* To feel something – to know you exist
* To feel in control
* To get a buzz
* To express or stop sexual feelings
* To turn emotional pain into physical pain

To fit in with beliefs or thoughts

* To punish yourself because you are “bad”.
* To maintain negative belief “I’m flawed, worthless, and weird”.
* To escape from feelings of guilt

To communicate

* To let people know how bad things are
* To make your body show your pain
* To express anger towards others and yourself but on your own body
* To obtain and maintain a response from other that you feel you wouldn’t otherwise get

Many people want to stop self-harming. There are many reasons people want to stop self-harming, for example because the scars remind them of when they did it, people look at the scars so it stops you wearing certain clothes, and it upsets the people you are close too. It is often not enough for you, as a parent, to want your child to stop self-harming. They need to want to stop self-harming as well. They need to find their own disadvantages to their self-harm behaviour. You might be able to talk to them about this. When you do, listen and ask questions such as “Why do you find self-harm helpful” and avoid blaming them for their actions. Ask them what they think the disadvantages are, rather than giving them your long list of disadvantages. It is more powerful and meaningful if they come up with the answers themselves as they would have had the full thought process and thinking around the issue, rather than being given the answers.

## as a parent how can I help?

Self-harm is often kept secret and your child may try to cover up. Encourage them to talk about the difficulties that led to the self-harm and take them seriously. Show them that you care, listen sympathetically, and offer to help them solve any problems.

Take practical steps such as buying blister packs of medicine in small amounts and keep medicines locked away. If your child takes an overdose ensure that you take them to hospital for treatment. Do not rely on them telling you the complete truth or remembering how much they have taken. It is always worth seeking hospital treatment as different medications can have different side effects if taken as an overdose.

If your child has injured themselves help them to attend to their injuries and provide clean dressings. If the injury is serious take them to hospital for treatment.

It can be difficult as a parent to cope when your child is self-harming or suicidal. Try to keep calm and caring, even if you are frightened and anxious. This will help your child know that you can handle their distress and can come to you for help in the future.

Remember that it takes time for someone to change their behaviour. Your child may continue to struggle with their feelings and with self-harm. Your continued care and support will be important to help them to slowly change their behaviour.

In the teenager self-help pack your child has been given the following strategies to help them control the self-harm. As a parent you can help by keeping your child safe and removing medications and sharp objects. In addition your child needs to learn how to cope with difficult emotions in other, less harmful, ways.

These are the suggestions that they have been given. Try to encourage them to have ago.

##### Controlling the self-harm

* It might help to keep a diary of when you self-harm. This might help you understand your self-harm. It might help you see a pattern to your self-harm which will help you put some other ideas into place.
* Keep away from things you might use to harm yourself.
* Try to delay and distract the self-harm by doing something different:
  + Exercise: run, jog, swim, cycle, dance, run up and down the stairs
  + Go for a walk
  + Clean the house
  + Go to the shops
  + Read a magazine
  + Play a game on your phone
  + Watch a video on YouTube
  + Tidy up
* Try the “10 minute delay”. Say to yourself that you will wait 10 minutes to self-harm. When the time is up, think again. Can you wait another 10 minutes? If you have what you might use to self-harm with you, try putting them out of sight or in another room.
* Do something nice for yourself,, have a nice meal, a favourite (non-alcoholic) drink, pamper yourself, have a warm shower.
* Use a calm breathing technique. Find somewhere comfortable to sit. Concentrate on your breathing; breathing in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, and breathe out for 6 seconds. Don’t worry too much about the timings. The main idea is that you slow down your breathing.
* Call a friend or someone you trust
* Try to speak to yourself in a kind, caring, compassionate way. Think about some calm things that you can say to yourself when you are wanting to self-harm. For example, “I’ve got through this before”, “I can cope”, “I deserve better than this”

What are you feeling? Try to be clear about what it is that you are feeling. Try to label it, observe it, and accept that emotion. Ask yourself why you are feeling this way. Remember you do not have to act on this feeling. Try to resist the urge to get rid of difficult feelings go away which often triggers the urge to self-harm.

Try to think of other ways for expressing your feelings, for example:

* Having a good cry
* Doing vigorous exercise
* Writing down your feelings
* Drawing or other art
* Play music
* Telling someone else how you *really* feel
* Keeping a diary
* Sing or play an instrument

If you still feel like hurting yourself try some alternatives such as:

* Pinching yourself
* Holding an ice cube
* Snapping an elastic band on your wrist
* Punching a pillow/cushion

If you still feel like hurting yourself try to limit the damage.

## SUICIDE

Firstly as a parent you may be very concerned about your child talking about suicide. You may fear that it will give you’re the child the idea to commit suicide and increase the risk of them being suicidal. Research has shown that the opposite is true. By asking about suicide and talking about it directly this can help reduce people’s risk of suicide. It is often difficult for people to talk about feeling suicidal, it can often be a great relief for them to share their experiences.

This section mirrors the suicide section in the teenager self-help pack. It first explains a bit about suicidal thoughts and feelings, and then gives ideas on what to do about them. Think about how you might be able to support them using these ideas.

#### Explaining Suicide

Suicidal thoughts and feelings can be complicated, terrifying and confusing. Lots of young people do feel suicidal at some point. Unfortunately, young people do go on to kill themselves, which is why it is important to get help if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings.

There are many reasons why you might start to experience suicidal thoughts:

* You might think that you can no longer cope and you cannot see a reason to live.
* You might have thoughts about suicide which seem to pop into your head and you may feel scared that you might act on these thoughts.
* You may hate yourself so much and think that other people would be better off if you are not here.
* You may feel overwhelmed by difficult situations or something has happened to really upset you.
* Or you may not know why you feel suicidal and have no reason to kill yourself; this is frightening and difficult because you then may feel bad for having these types of thoughts.

Whatever your reason for feeling suicidal, you are likely to be experiencing similar things;

* You may feel hopeless
* You may think things cannot change
* You may obsess about things
* You may find it hard to solve problems
* You may have images of suicide
* You may feel agitated and irritable
* You may behave impulsively and recklessly
* You may make plans based on your suicidal thoughts.

#### What can you do?

* Get help and share how you are feeling with someone.
  + Could you talk to a family member or family friend? Could you talk to a trusted friend? A teacher? The school nurse? Your GP?
  + You could contact services for help:
    - Berkshire Anxiety and Depression Pathway Duty Number: 0118 949 5060
    - Berkshire CAMHS Out of hours Number: 0300 365 0300
    - Samaritans: 0845 7 90 90 90
    - HopeLine UK: 0800 068 41 41
    - Child Line: 0800 1111
  + If you find it difficult to talk about how you are feeling try writing things down or emailing or texting one of your contacts.
* Get rid of ways of harming yourself
  + Ahead of time hand over stocks of medication, remove alcohol, remove sharp objects
  + In the moment – put things out of sight, take things and put them in a different room. This will help give you time.
* Even if you don’t feel like it spend time with other people or do an activity. Withdrawing and being on your own is often not help when you are feeling suicidal.
* When you are feeling suicidal it can be easy to think of the advantages. Instead remember the disadvantages of suicide, for example missing your family, you can’t change your mind, it would be painful, it might go wrong.
* Remember reasons to live. Who would you miss? Who do you care about? Who would miss you? What are your future dreams and plans? What contribution do you make to the lives of others?
* Be kind to yourself – be your own friend. These moments of pain will pass.
* Get out and be active
* Do not drink alcohol or take drugs – they will make much more difficult to think clearly and make sensible decisions and could make your mood worse.
* As a parent you can also call the helplines and ask to speak to someone if you are worried about your child.

#### **If you do not feel you can keep your child safe call the emergency services on 999 or go to A&E**

## What if you need your own help?

There may be times when you are struggling with your own mental health, you might also feel low or anxious, you might also think about hurting yourself.

You can get support by:

* Going to your GP
* Going to talking therapies for your own therapy and resources: [www.talkingtherapies.berkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.talkingtherapies.berkshire.nhs.uk)

You can also use the strategies laid out in this guide.

## What Next?

If things get worse for your child and you need support then you can:

* Go back to your GP
* Call us. The Berkshire Anxiety and Depression Pathway Admin number is: 0118 378 8926. You can ask to speak to the Duty Worker who will be able to talk to you about the current situation and give support.
* Call the Out of Hours Number: 0300 365 0300