

## Talking to your teenager about his or her depression



### Should you do something?

Low mood in teenage years may be short lived. However, if there is a marked change in your teenager's mood, if it is ongoing and significantly affecting your teenagers happiness, ability to perform and sociability, then its time to address it.

### Getting together

Depending on the family structure, it will be more effective if both parents (if together) can agree there is a problem and address it together. If this is not possible, the concerned parents or carer should take the lead, moving things forward as quickly as possible.

The nature of depression is to create negativity, despondency and despair or helplessness in the person experiencing it. This means that it may seem difficult to get your teenager to take on board that something is wrong and that you need them to engage in sorting things out. Don't give up on the face of this negativity, since its often contagious and can make you feel despairing too! The goal is to offer acceptance and help but at the same time ongoing encouragement to make change. It will help you to understand the nature of teenage depression and reading the section for parents in the STEM4 website is encouraged.

### Talking to your teenager

#### A Getting them to listen: your goal is to raise awareness that something's not right.

For example: 'There seems to be a difference in how we perceive things and how you do and we would like to work on this difference.'

- 1 Allocate a private time and state your concerns clearly.
- 2 In terms of what to say, focus on your observations and your concerns.
- 3 Statements are better than questions.  
For example, 'David, I've noticed you haven't been catching up with many of your friends, seems like things are difficult at the moment'
- 4 Be tentative. Don't start with sensitive subjects, eg. "I notice how you've hurt yourself by cutting your arms."

#### B Being on the receiving end – learning to listen.

The goal here is to establish that you want to hear their view. To do this:

- 1 Listen first, give them time and space to speak keeping in mind that thinking works differently and slowly when you are depressed. Don't rush someone into speaking.
- 2 Listen and respect their point of view.
- 3 Don't dismiss by simplistic reassurance. If you are going to say "it will be alright" give reasons for why you think so.
- 4 Validate how they feel rather than dismiss. They may present their view by dismissing themselves – "I know it's silly but . . ." Don't agree with them. Putting oneself down is about low self-esteem, which lies at the core of depression. Suspend your judgements.

**Be prepared for your teenager to initially deny they feel bad.**

### C Making change.

Your next goal is to get your teenager the correct help.

**Don't leave depression untreated** – it can lead to other complications, eg. various forms of self harm, and can affect the academic, social and emotional development of your teenager significantly.

If getting your teenager to accept help is difficult, **don't give up** – keep trying. Remember the features of depression are apathy and lack of self-confidence.

**Keep communication going**, this time with intent, but keep this encouraging rather than insistent. For example, "I have made an appointment with our GP to look at what might be available to help with your sleep / give you more energy / increase your concentration / get you better in time for your world challenge trip", etc.

**Listen out for anything that might motivate your teenager** and push that one factor. For example, not wanting to miss out on a sports event or a school trip. Use this as a level for change.

**Arrange for things to be easy**, for example instead of expecting them to do something on their own accord, break into small steps and do it with them, or if they don't want to go out, arrange for things to happen more at home

**You can also make an appointment for yourself to see your GP to check on what other resources they offer at the surgery or locally for young people.**