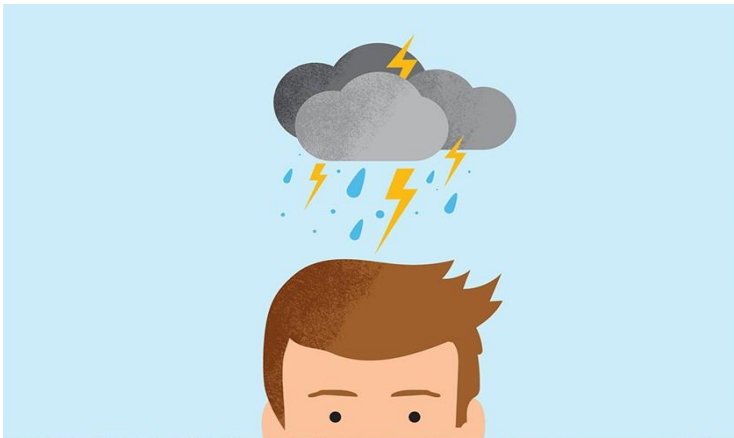


Children's Psychological Health and Wellbeing team-

Understanding Low Mood:
For young people and their families.



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Why do we experience low mood?

Lots of young people experience low mood at some point in their life. It may be more likely to occur when people are going through a difficult or challenging experience such as:

- Stressful time at school (e.g. exams or a big project)
- Bullying
- Illness or poor health
 - Coping with a long-term health condition
- Losing someone or something important to you
- Relationship difficulties
- Big changes in your life (e.g. Moving schools)
- Hormonal changes

Despite this, some people experience low mood when there doesn't seem to be an obvious cause for it.

What are the symptoms of low mood?

When young people are experiencing low mood they may have long periods of feeling some or all of the following:

- Sadness
- Anxiety or worry
- Lack of motivation and enjoyment of things
- Low self-esteem and low confidence
- Frustration or anger

You may also notice the following physical symptoms:

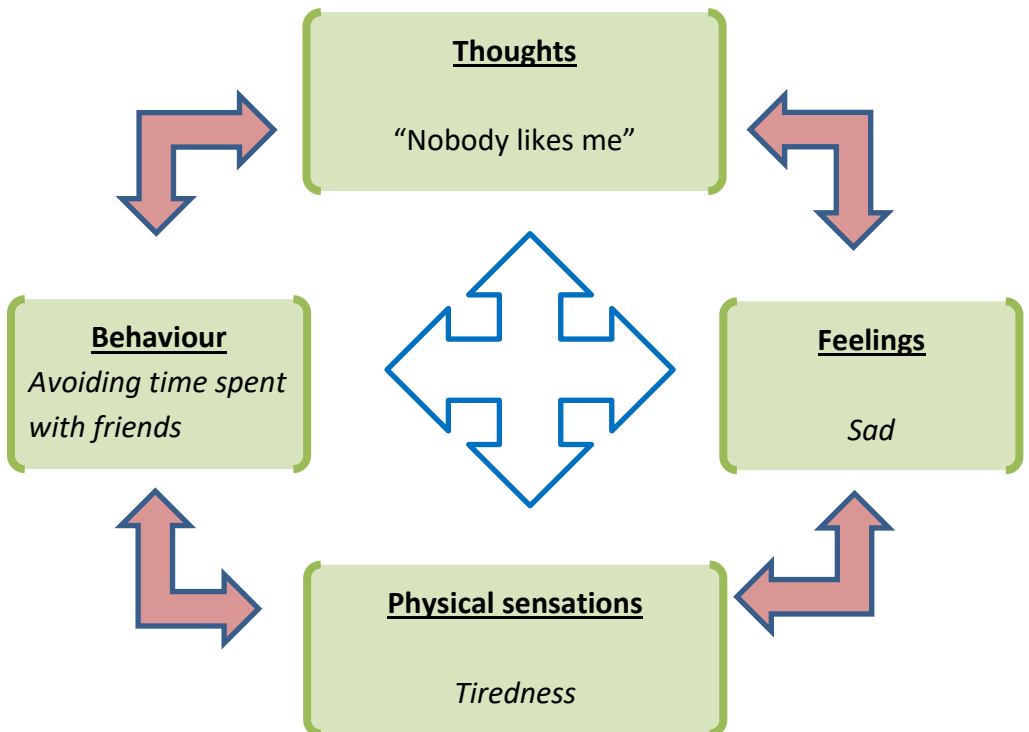
- Tiredness or lack of energy to do everyday tasks
- Poor appetite (either eating too little or too much)
- Difficulty sleeping or getting up in the morning



Why do people feel low?

Low mood can influence the way people feel physically and mentally. It also influences our thoughts and behaviour. This can create a cycle that is difficult to break which is why some people continue to feel low for long periods of time. To understand this a bit more clearly, take a look at the example in the diagram below.

Diagram 1



As you can see from the diagram, our thoughts, feelings and behaviour all influence each other and can lead to low mood. If you are feeling low, it may be helpful to think about this and how your experiences may fit into this cycle.

What can you do to improve your low mood?

If someone is feeling low, the best thing to do is to break the negative cycle shown in diagram 1. Ways to do this include:

1. Challenging unhelpful thoughts
2. Keeping busy
3. Improving nutrition and sleep
4. Problem solving
5. Noticing the good bits about yourself
6. Connecting with others



We will now explore these ideas in a bit more detail.

1. Challenging unhelpful thoughts:

We have lots of thoughts throughout the day, often about ourselves, others, the world and the future. Some of these thoughts are unhelpful and not always based on fact – even if we think they are. To challenge these, we can think:

- Is there any evidence that suggests this thought is not true?
- What would I say to my friend if they were thinking this?
- What are the pros and cons of this thought?
- Is there another way to look at this situation?

Here's an example of this:

· **Unhelpful thought:**

'I think that my friends find me annoying.'

· **Is there any evidence that suggests this thought is not true?**

They always invite me to go to the park with them.

·

What would you say to your friend if they were thinking this?

I don't find you annoying, I like spending time with you.

· What are the pros and cons of this thought?

Pros:

** It can be helpful to think about how we act around our friends, and accept that we can all have good and bad days.*

Cons:

** I could stop spending time with my friends and feel lonely.*

** I may feel less confident about myself.*

** I might stop trying to make friends as they may feel the same.*

· Is there another way to look at this situation?

I often get invited out and my friends tell me I am fun to be around.





2. Keeping busy:

When you feel low, it is important that you continue to do things that you have enjoyed, even when you do not feel like it.

Try to find a good balance between doing the things you need to do, like homework, as well as doing the things you enjoy.

Some examples of things that can help this are:

- Spending time with people, even for a short time
- Continuing with hobbies and interests or try something new
- Try to do some physical activity, this is good for our bodies and our minds.

Exercise

It may sound difficult, but doing some exercise will help with feeling low, loss of energy and tiredness. Exercise increases your level of endorphins which are natural mood lifters, it limits the effect of stress on your brain and it helps get your sleep patterns back to normal. Try to plan some activities into your day; this could be simple like a short walk. Although keeping busy is important, having enough relaxation time in the day is needed too. This could be having a bubble bath every evening or watching your favourite TV shows. All of this can help you to feel better.

3. Nutrition and sleep:

When our mood is low, our diet and sleep can often be affected.

Sleep problems can take many forms such as; difficulty falling asleep, waking up throughout the night, struggling to get up in the mornings and many other issues. This can impact on the choices we make such as our diet. When we are feeling tired, we may turn to a sugary treat for some energy such as an energy drink which can make us feel worse later on. Here are some useful do's and don'ts;

- Try not to sleep in the day, this makes it harder to sleep at night. If you're feeling tired, go for a walk, get some fresh air.
- Relax before you go to bed! Try to chill out for an hour or so before bed time to help wind down. Try meditation or reading. You could ask for a relaxation leaflet from the therapist.
- Don't drink any stimulants before bed such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate or sugary soft drinks. Try decaffeinated drinks as a replacement.
- Have a bed time routine every night which will help your body regulate. A good sleeping pattern will help improve your mood. Ask your therapist for a copy of our sleep leaflet for more ideas.
- Snack on healthy things like fruit and vegetables.





4. Problem solving

Feeling powerless in a situation can often be a cause of low mood. If you feel as though you are trapped in a situation and you do not know how to fix it, this could send you into a low mood cycle. A good way to solve a problem is to break it down. If you feel like you are stuck with a problem that you cannot solve, try using diagram 2. It may help you solve your problem

Is low mood the same as being depressed?

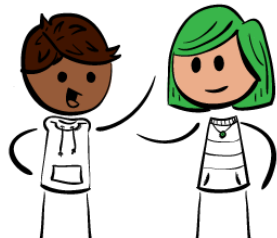
Some of the symptoms of low mood can be the same as depression. The main difference is that low mood generally passes with time and can come and go. Depression tends to last for longer and can be more difficult to overcome. There are also some extra symptoms that people experiencing depression may have:

- Feeling hopeless and helpless
- Feeling tearful
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling irritable and snapping at others

- Little motivation or interest in things
- Difficultly making decisions
- Not enjoying anything, even things that usually make you happy
- Having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- Weight loss or gain
- Finding it difficult to sleep or difficulty waking up
- Not wanting to spend time with others
- Difficulty getting on with people
- Poor concentration and/ or memory

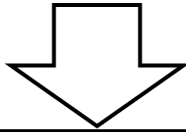
If you ever feel like your low mood goes on for a long period of time, or you develop any of these symptoms, it may be worth talking to an adult you trust. This could be someone at school, a doctor or someone in your family. You could also use some of the helplines at the back of this leaflet.

It is good to talk!



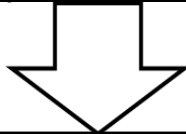
Identify the problem:

e.g.: 'I have fallen out with someone'



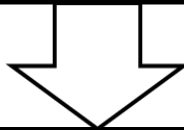
List possible solutions: e.g.:

- 'Ignore them'
- 'Tell them how I feel'
- 'Talk to someone else about it'
- 'Think about when this has happened before'
- 'Ask for advice'



Choose a solution and break it down into a step by step approach: e.g.:

1. Call them
2. Explain how you feel
3. Ask them how they feel
4. Apologise if helpful
5. Arrange to spend some time together again



Try it out! Follow the steps and then think about how it went.

E.g.: what went well, and what could I have done differently?

5. Noticing the good bits about yourself

We tend to focus on things we do not like about ourselves, more than the things we like. When you are feeling low in mood, make a list of all the things you like about yourself. It sounds silly, but it's a great way to give your self-esteem a boost. If you cannot think of anything, this list may help:

- Things people say you are good at.
- Things you are proud of.
- What qualities do other people like in you

Once you have thought of things, have a think about any evidence that you have to support it. For example:

- Compliments you receive
- Times people 'thank you'

To help you make a start, look at the following example:

Good things about me:	Evidence:
	(I know this because...)
I am really helpful	Mum always thanks me for helping her
I am really good at maths	I do really well in class

6. Connecting with others

Spending time with other people can help you feel better, even if you are not doing very much. Often when we have low mood this is something we do not want to do, but this is when we need it the most. You could let others know how you are feeling, so you can join in as much or as little as you want to. Whilst talking and getting advice can be important, just being in the same room as others could help your mood.

Finally...

These techniques should provide you with some ideas to help to improve your low mood. It is important to realise that you are not alone and that your low mood will not last forever.

If you feel like your low mood is getting the better of you, make sure you talk to someone you trust about it. This could be someone at your school, a family member or your GP

Useful Contacts, Apps and websites:

Young Minds.

If you are a parent or carer, you could contact 'Young Minds'. This is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Young Minds offers advice for parents or carers who are concerned about a child young person's mental health.

Parent Helpline: **0808 802 5544**

Website: youngminds.org.uk

Childline.

A free 24hr helpline for children and young people based in the UK to call at any time anonymously and confidentially about any concerns you may have.

Helpline: **0800 1111**

Website: childline.org.uk

Kooth

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people Website: www.kooth.com

Youtube.

How to be a friend to yourself –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFUxiIjp-Nk>

Get self help

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) has been proven to help mental health problems. This website provides CBT self-help and therapy resources, including worksheets and information sheets and self-help mp3s

Website: www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Headspace:

Headspace.com/kids

App for Phone/tablet

This is a free App to help with relaxation. The skills taught include mindfulness, breathing exercises, meditation practice, tips for increased relaxation and concentration.

Additional apps:

- Youper
- Mood tools
- Stop, breathe & think.
- CalmHarm



Acknowledgements/funding
(if relevant)

This leaflet is available in large print
and other formats and languages.
Please contact: *name and contact
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