

# Depression: spotting symptoms and what to do next

Many of us are living with depression (a mental illness referred to as a mood disorder) and it is more prevalent among education staff than the general population. The good news, however, is that there has been progress in how we treat, accept, and understand depression. Read on for guidance if you think you might have depression.

According to the NHS, depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days. We know that education professionals display a much higher level of depression (32%) than the general population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on people's wellbeing — both their physical and mental health. More teaching assistants are speaking openly about their challenges and colleagues are showing their support.

Whilst there is more acceptance/understanding/awareness of mental health and illness than ever before, we recognise that it can still feel difficult to speak up. You are not alone.

**Here we cover some of the signs of depression and tips on what to do if you have or think you have depression.**



## Where to get support and steps you could take



Call our free and confidential helpline, staffed by qualified counsellors available 24/7 on **08000 562 561**



In emergency situations call 111 or 999



Call your GP to book an appointment. Talk to them about what you are experiencing.



*Read more on NHS mental health services*

# Spotting the signs: the difference between low mood and depression

When you're going through a change in feelings and behaviours, you may not always clearly see that what you're experiencing is a mental illness. You're likely to be feeling frustrated, confused, and worried, leaving you unable to (in that moment) recognise symptoms of depression. Rest assured that this is ok and common!



“*Depression is not always caused by work but can impact massively on work life. I feel over the last few years depression has been openly talked about more giving it more of an acceptance rather than an excuse for not being and feeling ok. Definitely having the right support from peers and managers and knowing that they are there to help is a big reassurance. Asking for help is also a massive step as many people suffer in silence so for someone to recognise that you may be struggling is sometimes easier than admitting it.*

Teaching Assistant



Here is an outline to help explain some of the changes you might be going through.

**Low mood:** We all experience challenging times. These could trigger feeling unhappy or sad. However, these feelings last for a short period of time and don't interrupt your daily life.

**Depression:** Is a mental illness known as a mood disorder that can interrupt your daily life and work. Signs include:

- Losing interest in what you once enjoyed
- Feeling inexplicably teary
- Not wanting to socialise or face a group of students
- Struggling to get out of bed
- Feeling hopeless, very tired or irritable
- Experiencing physical symptoms such as body aches and pains
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm?

While depression is a common mental illness, no two experiences are the same and symptoms vary from mild to severe.

It is important to seek help, this might be from your GP in the first instance who can advise you further. Always seek help as soon as you can, despite how minor you think your symptoms are.

# What to do if you're experiencing depression

**What happens now?** Whether you have noticed a change in your feelings and behaviours, or been diagnosed as having depression, it can be hard to know what to do next to get the support and help that's right for you.

Here are a few thoughts you might be having at this time, with some recommended next steps.

## 1. I think I have depression, but I don't know who to turn to. I'm not sure that I want to talk to anyone

It's ok to be feeling this way. Staying connected can help ease feelings of hopelessness and loneliness. When facing challenges on your own, it can be hard to keep a healthy perspective. But the nature of depression also means you might want to withdraw and isolate, so connecting can be the last thing you want to do.

It's important to remember that there are people who will want to help and treatments available. If you feel comfortable, reach out to trusted colleagues, family and friends, and of course contact the [Education Support helpline](#) and your GP.

## 2. I'm finding it hard to work, but nervous about speaking to my line manager

It is valid to feel uncertain about bringing up depression at work, and teaching assistants, teachers and school leaders can be especially worried about the consequences. Your school, college or university has a duty of care to make sure they can reasonably do what they can to support you. Someone with a mental health condition that could be classed as a disability

(as per the *definition* in the Equality Act) cannot be discriminated against. This means you should not be treated less favourably as a result of a disability or perceived disability.

You could try to reach out to a trusted colleague in the first instance, before speaking to your manager.

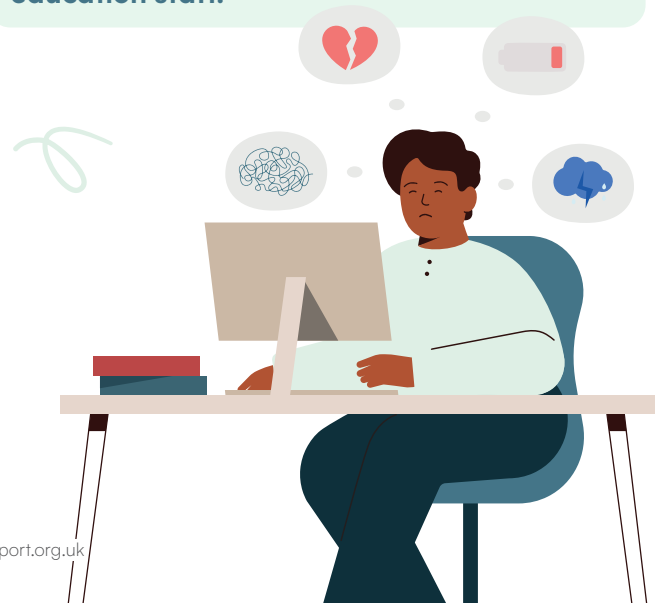
## 3. I'm ready to know what type of treatments there are

If you're ready to consider treatment options, you've made a big step and should congratulate yourself - getting help is not a sign of weakness, it shows incredible strength.

**According to the NHS, depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days.**



Always remember the free and confidential helpline is here 24/7 throughout the UK on 08000 562 561 for all education staff.



### Sources:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/top-depression-symptoms-1066910>

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/guides/depression-what-you-can-do-in-the-workplace/>

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/guides/suicide-suicidal-feelings-and-working-in-schools/>