



Advice for Parents & Carers

About low mood ...

Children and young people are not the first age group that comes to mind when we think of low mood but it is one of the most common referral reasons at Bromley Wellbeing. Feeling sad is often a normal response to events happening in our lives, but children and young people can end up 'stuck' in patterns of negative thinking and the low feelings do not go away.

These are some of the observable signs of low mood:

- Seems more down/less happy in general – do not seem like themselves
- Tearful or easily irritated
- Lacking motivation and energy
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Spending increasing amount of time by themselves/not wanting to communicate
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Increase or decrease of appetite
- Poor concentration/easily distracted

It can be difficult for parents and carers to judge whether these are signs of low mood or whether they are just part of growing up. The stereotypical 'moody teenager' is irritable, cannot be bothered to do things and spends more time by themselves in their room than with the family. However, if their low mood appears persistent, with few or no periods of happiness, and it's impacting their life at home, school and/or with their friends, it is likely they would benefit from some extra support.

What can I do to help them with low mood? ...

- Talk to your child about the signs you have noticed in a non-judgmental way. Remember to listen and empathise! Also bear in mind they may not be ready to talk about it – you can always try again
- Explain what low mood is and how it can affect us – validating their experiences can really help young people understand what is going on for them.

- Use any opportunity to praise or thank your child – even for small things and especially for trying to do things. This sort of positivity can help counteract any negative thoughts or low self-esteem and shows them you are paying attention.
- Remember there might not be a specific reason for why they are feeling low – or at least **not** one they are aware of. Help your child to focus on what could make things better.
- Encourage healthy habits such as balanced eating, physical activity and a good sleep routine. People with low mood often struggle with these which creates a vicious cycle.
- Help them set some goals about what they would like to be doing more/less of and work together to think about how they could achieve them (see Activity Scheduling below)
- Consider if you can give them any leeway about chores or expectations to help take some pressure off. Make clear boundaries about this – you do not want to enable a complete lack of activity.

- Self-harming behaviours and suicidal thoughts are unfortunately common with young people experiencing low mood. Do not be afraid to ask them if they are deliberately hurting themselves or having thoughts of this nature – you will not put the idea in their head and talking openly about this can reduce any feelings of shame. If there are any elements of risk, contact a professional service for further advice/support.
- If you or your child are really concerned about how low mood is impacting them, discuss making a referral to Bromley Wellbeing.

Activity Scheduling ...

Activity scheduling is a key element and a common aspect of therapy for people struggling with depression and one with a large evidence base for its effectiveness. It is based on the idea that when we feel low, we are usually lacking energy and demotivated, so we do not want to do anything. However, by withdrawing and doing very little, we have no opportunities to improve our mood: the lower we feel, the less we do; the less we do, the lower we feel.

To help you child bring out of this cycle, introduce them to the mantra “action before motivation.” People struggling with depression cannot wait to ‘be in the mood’ or feel motivated to do something – they just need to push through and do it. Young people need some support to do this.

Here are some key tips to trying this strategy with your child – remember to include them in making decisions!

1. *Make sure activities are meaningful for your child*

Consider their values – what is important to them? What do they want more of in their life? What activities could help achieve this? Is this something they would want to do if they felt better? Is it related to something they value?

2. *Aim for a balance of activities*

As a guide, we recommend a balance across activities, young people should be able to gain a sense of achievement, closeness to others and enjoyment. (Not all activities need to be highly rated for all three!)

3. *Start small and build things up gradually*

Keep in mind what is realistic for your child to achieve at the moment. Starting with one or two relatively ‘easy’ activities they can accomplish will help build their confidence. Going for a short walk or talking with a friend for 20 mins might be more than they have done for a while.

4. Plan!

It may feel excessive, but thorough planning can increase the chance of success for activities. Agree when they will do the activity, consider if anything is needed for it and/or if anyone is going to help them with it. Discuss potential barriers and how to address these. How will they reward themselves if they complete the activity?

5. Reflect on how activities went.

Did they gain any sense of achievement, closeness to others or enjoyment from it? Did they want to do it beforehand? Are they glad they did it? This helps young people recognise any progress they are making and helps reinforce this new cycle: doing things we enjoy or which are meaningful improves our mood which makes us want to engage in more things we enjoy.

If you want to try Activity Scheduling with your child, Get Self Help has some useful resources:

[Get Self Help - Healthy Life Balance](#)

[Get Self Help - Behavioural Activation](#)

Other helpful resources:

[Young Minds: Supporting your child with depression](#)

[Family Lives: Supporting teenagers with sleep](#)