



EPSOM

COLLEGE

Depression Policy

Introduction

This policy outlines the College's response to managing a student presenting with depression whilst the student is in school. The policy serves to assist the student and their parents in the management of their depression as well as helping Housemasters/mistresses', the Medical Centre staff and other teachers understand how to help the individual concerned.

Definition of clinical depression

Depression is a common mental health disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep and/or changes of appetite, low energy and poor concentration.

It is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether an individual is just feeling sad or miserable; everyone's mood will change during the day and from day to day. It is important to recognise that depression is a widely, and often incorrectly used word and as a result its meaning has become somewhat confused. Young people today may talk about being "depressed" when they are actually disappointed, fed up or feeling sad. True depression is when there is *consistent* low mood and a loss of interest and self-worth.

It is often present out of proportion to any precipitating factors or even without any external cause. Whilst it is important to identify any causal or contributory factors, these should not be seen as a requirement for diagnosis.

Possible causes of depression amongst adolescents

- Difficulty negotiating being a teenager;
- Experiencing more than their fair share of situational crises;
- Specific individual characteristics such as low self-esteem and perfectionism;
- Specific family characteristics (other family members suffering mental health problems or a history of suicide in the family);
- Alcoholism or drug use by with young person or within their family;
- Sexual or physical abuse patterns in the family;
- How easily they relate socially to peers;
- Physical illness and medication;
- Being bullied;
- Experiencing a bereavement;
- Relationship difficulties with their families or peers.

Supporting pupils with depression

Anxiety and depression are serious problems for teenagers. Teachers are well placed to notice the changes caused by anxiety and depression. Common features of anxiety and depression include:

- Tension;
- Worry;
- Frustration;
- Irritability;
- Sadness;
- Withdrawal;
- Isolation;
- Worthlessness.

Young people do not often express their anxiety or depression in a straightforward way and can show they are affected through passive or negative behaviours – they may appear disinterested or their behaviour may become more attention-seeking in style. Such changes can be picked up effectively by teachers, tutors and Housemaster/mistresses. All members of staff working at the College should also be aware that they may be the first port of call for a young person who may wish to speak about their feelings for the first time.

Epsom College also has a safeguarding and child protection responsibility to deal as quickly and appropriately as possible with presenting mental health problems and any situation in which the wellbeing of an individual student is threatened.

Identifying teenage depression at school may be difficult but some of the **warning signs** include:

Behavioural factors

- Changes in school performance – a change in effort grades / not handing in the same quality work;
- Loss of concentration;
- Slow performance;
- Difficulty sticking to deadlines;
- Withdrawal from friends and activities;
- Absent from school more and not wanting to return to school on a Sunday evening (if a Boarder);
- Lack of engagement;
- May become more challenging behaviourally;
- Skipping lessons and making excuses;
- Self-harm;
- Risky behaviour – e.g. excessive drinking at the weekend;
- Obsessive behaviour;
- Over or under activity in particular tasks;
- Neglect of appearance.

Physical factors:

- Changes in weight and appetite;
- May avoid physical activity;
- Appears tired and without energy;
- May present with a lot more physical illness, aches and pains, absences from school due to illness.

Psychological factors:

- Looks sad and withdrawn;
- Less able to concentrate;
- Memory changes;
- Reduced motor speed;
- Easily irritable and angry;
- More easily tearful.

Social factors:

- Friends may present with concerns;
- Withdrawal from social group;
- Forming new and transient friendships;
- Not joining in any social activities;
- Not contributing in group work or in class.

The flow chart below should be followed if you have concerns about a pupil, if another pupil raises concerns about one of their friends or if an individual pupil speaks to you specifically about how they are feeling.

It should be noted that the symptoms highlighted above may be apparent in young people where anxiety rather than depression would be the key issue. It is therefore vitally important that if a member of staff has concerns they speak to a professional

SUPPORT and LISTEN

Reassure; tell them how brave they have been; empathise with them and given them time to talk; gently explain that you would like to help them; work with them to gain their confidence to take the issue to someone who could help further; do not promise confidentiality – depression could be a child protection matter and the young person needs help; work through the avenues of support; explain that you would like to share their thoughts with someone else so that they can get the best help; encourage them to speak to someone – offer to go with them.



AVENUES OF SUPPORT AT EPSOM

Housemaster/mistress, Tutor, Matron,
School Chaplain, School Counsellor, Head of
PSD, Deputy Head (Pastoral)
College GPs and nurses
(Appointments are available every week day in
the Medical Centre)

TELL SOMEONE

Remember that you are not trained to deal
with mental health issues and you should
speak to someone about your concerns who
has the expertise to help the individual.

Even if the young person tells you that they
don't want you to tell someone, they
probably do – otherwise they would not have
told you in the first place.

AFTERWARDS

Do not speak about the conversation to other
pupils /casually to other members of staff

Access support for yourself if you need it;
there is a counselling service for staff or a
senior colleague or line manager will happily
speak to you and support you.

Useful resources

Stem4: <http://www.stem4.org.uk/>

Young Minds: <http://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Childline: <http://www.childline.org.uk>

Youth2Youth: <http://youth2youth.org.uk>

Mind: <http://mind.org.uk>