

# Depression



**Depression is characterized by symptoms such as persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, dejection and guilt; withdrawal from activities and people; poor concentration; lack of energy; inability to sleep; weight loss or gain; anxiety, irritability or agitation; and/or thoughts of death or suicide. Depression may be caused by a loss, by genetic or biochemical factors, or by past or ongoing trauma. Students with disabilities are as vulnerable to depression as the general population. Depression is usually treated with counselling and/or medication.**

## Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support this student's needs related to depression. This could include finding out about:
  - the student's strengths, interests and areas of need
  - specific symptoms that may affect the student at school
  - any other associated disorders that need to be considered at school
  - successful strategies used at home or in the community that also could be used at school.
- If the student is taking medication during the school day, discuss with the parents possible side effects. Follow school and/or jurisdictional policies and protocols in storing and administering medicine.
- Be aware that some students may feel uncomfortable discussing or taking their medications at school. Discuss this with the student and family and determine how best to support the student.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student's condition and successful strategies.
- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed consultation and services.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student's parents.

## Implications for Instruction

- Recognize that depression can affect learning in several ways, including:
  - poor concentration
  - lack of focus and motivation
  - giving up easily due to lack of confidence
  - forgetfulness and indecision
  - diminished ability to think clearly and analyze problems.
- Be aware that test scores of students with depression (both achievement and intelligence) may not reflect the student's true ability.
- Structure the environment to ensure lots of success through small, attainable goals. Help the student to self-monitor progress.



- Encourage the student to be proactive and take more control over the environment (e.g., initiate contact with other students, ask for help when needed, speak up in class).

### Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Provide a safe, predictable classroom, with clear rules and routines.
- Teach the entire class about identifying and interpreting emotions; how to handle or react to fear, anger or disappointment; and what to do if they are worried about a classmate or friend.
- Incorporate music, art and relaxation techniques into classroom routines to help reduce symptoms of depression.
- Teach assertiveness as an alternative to passivity or anger.
- Teach social skills through modelling and rehearsal.
- Teach for and encourage positive self-talk (e.g., “This work is hard but I have learned difficult things before when I tried hard.”).

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.

### As you consider the implications for this medical condition, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student’s medical needs?  Yes  No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning?  Yes  No  
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore?
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required?  Yes  No  
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children’s Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)?  Yes  No  
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?

### Links for further information:

- Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation. *When Something’s Wrong: Ideas for Teachers: Depression*. [http://cprf.ca/publication/pdf/teacher\\_07\\_eng.pdf](http://cprf.ca/publication/pdf/teacher_07_eng.pdf)
- National Association of School Psychologists. “Depression: Helping Students in the Classroom.” [http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/depressclass\\_ho.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/depressclass_ho.pdf)
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. *Teaching Students with Mental Health Disorders Resources for Teachers: Volume 2 Depression*. [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/depression\\_resource.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/depression_resource.pdf)

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