

Understanding Depression for Young People in Out-of-Home Care

A Feeling Better Initiative

Growing up in out-of-home care can be tough. Research shows that people who grow up in care experience higher rates of depression (and poorer mental health more generally) than people who don't grow up in care. Because of this, it's important to know what depression is, what signs to look out for, understand why people in care are more at risk of depression, and where to go for help.

What is depression?

Depression is more than the passing sadness we feel when we break a phone, go through a break up or are not able to do something we want to do. Depression occurs when these feelings are ongoing, intense and interfere with your everyday life (like being able to go to work, hold down a job, cook, clean and have good relationships with other people). Although everyone's experience of depression will be different, there's a few key things to look out for:

Feelings of intense and lasting sadness and helplessness. You might also experience feelings of numbness, guilt, irritability, disappointment and lack of confidence.

Thoughts like 'I'm worthless', 'Life's not worth living', 'I feel empty' and 'Nothing good ever happens to me'.

Behaviours like not wanting to socialise, having angry outbursts, using drugs and/or alcohol, not being able to concentrate at school, work and/or at home and feeling teary and crying frequently.

Physical symptoms like feeling tired, unmotivated, gaining or losing a lot of weight and having trouble sleeping.

Here's how one young person in care described depression:

'I would know I was depressed if I was feeling down and out more days than I was feeling happy. If I was no longer enjoying the things that I normally enjoy. For me that is spending time with family and friends. If I no longer took pride in the way I look on a regular basis (like not washing my hair or wearing makeup). Feeling tired all the time even though I have had a decent sleep'.

Why are young people in care more at risk of experiencing depression?

There are lots of reasons why young people (generally) might feel depressed. For example, they may not get the school grades or job they want, and then feel worthless or inadequate. They might also be questioning their sexuality or having trouble fitting in with their friends.

Young people who are in out-of-home care however, can sometimes go through other tough situations that their friends who aren't in care don't go through. For example, they might move placements and schools a lot, not have contact with their birth parents and



siblings, have experienced abuse which continues to upset and affect them, feel shame about being in care and feel different from other people their age.

As well as this, adolescence is a time when teenagers are trying to develop a sense of identity and understand who they are. Experiencing loss, trauma and change like people in care often do, can complicate this process and make it even harder.

To me, depression is 'feeling like I haven't got control over my life. Wanting to change things about my life that I can't change. Feeling lonely, or not having anyone to talk to. High stress in my life. Or negative circumstances like a life event or the loss of a family member or friend'.

Where to go for help

It's important to seek support early if experiencing depression. Without support, symptoms can start to take over your life. Thankfully, there are lots of places and people who can help and support you if you are experiencing depression.

A lot of young people in care say that reaching out and speaking to someone they trust, like a carer, teacher or sports coach, really helps!

Is there someone in your life you trust and feel like you can talk to? If so, we really recommend talking to this person about what you're going through.

Otherwise, there are great workers you can reach out to:

KidsHelpLine

- 1800 55 1800
- <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- A 24-hour free and private phone and online counselling service for people aged 5 to 25.

Headspace

- <https://headspace.org.au/>

- headspace provides information and advice to young people about issues like general health, mental health and alcohol and drugs.

oneplace

- <https://www.oneplace.org.au/>
- oneplace is a free easily accessible online Community Services Directory for Queensland.

Mental Health care plan

Your GP may be able to help you access a mental health plan which will entitle you to up to 10 appointments with a support person like a psychologist or social worker.

Mental Health

Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) specialises in helping children and young people who have complex mental health needs. Talk to your GP or guidance officer and they can help refer you to CYMHS, or to other suitable services.

Here's what one young person had to say about her experience ...

'I'm linked in with a mental health service. I love my worker. She has helped to find and link me in with more supports.'

Of course, if you are in a life-threatening situation, you should always phone 000.

Here's some more advice from young people in care ...

'Some days will be hard but the feeling of getting through a depressed stage is the best feeling in the world. Don't be afraid to ask for help!'

'Being involved in social activities, such as band and karaoke, has helped me in so many ways'

'Keeping my body healthy - walking, eating healthy, doing photography, drawing - helps! Creative outlets like these are good because you can make something of your feelings'