

**Low Mood in Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

How common is low mood in ADHD?

* Children with ADHD are more at risk of developing further mental health concerns than children without ADHD, including low mood and depression.
* Up to 40% of children with ADHD will develop symptoms of low mood and depression.
* Low mood is more likely to develop in adolescents who have ADHD, although children of all ages can experience it.

What’s the link between ADHD and low mood?

* Young people with ADHD who have been through puberty are more likely to develop symptoms low mood.
* Having ADHD can create challenges for children with ADHD which can lead to low mood. Difficulties at school and with behaviour can contribute to low self-esteem. Peers may tease or exclude children with ADHD, which could make them feel isolated.

What are some signs of low mood in children with ADHD?

* Children with ADHD may exhibit symptoms of low mood similar to children without ADHD, including:
* Changes in sleep and eating patterns
* Low energy or fatigue
* Losing interest in favourite activities
* Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
* Talking about feeling hopeless or helpless
* Crying
* Withdrawing from friends
* Talking about dying, talking about taking their own life
* Children who have ADHD and low mood may also experience an exacerbation of their ADHD symptoms. Children with ADHD and low mood may start to:
* Be **unusually disruptive in the classroom**, including being irritable and snapping at people.
* **Appear more inattentive**; this may be because they are distracted by their low mood and their thoughts.
* Talk about **wanting to stop their medication** – some children may mistakenly link their low mood to their ADHD medication and stop taking it.
* Be **extremely overwhelmed and disorganised**. For a young person with ADHD and low mood, life can seem unmanageable and hopeless.
* Girls with ADHD show different symptoms to boys. Girls are more likely to have difficulty focusing and are less likely to show signs of hyperactivity. They may become withdrawn rather than acting out.

* Sometimes low mood or depression be misdiagnosed as ADHD, or vice versa. The two can look similar on the surface but be caused by very different reasons, as outlined below:
* Children **may lose motivation**. If a child has ADHD, they may think working at something won’t make a difference, and give up. Depressed children may not do their work because they feel there’s no point.
* Having **low self-esteem** may be signs of both ADHD and low mood. Children with ADHD may not feel good about themselves because they have trouble keeping up. Children with depression may feel they’re worthless for no apparent reason.
* **Difficulties with keeping up with schoolwork** can be a challenge children with ADHD face, as they may tune out in school and not learn the material. Children who are depressed may be distractive by negative feelings or lack of sleep and not be able to focus.
* Children may **resist going to school**. A child with ADHD might dread school because they know they’ll need to do things that are hard for them. Children with depression may not have the emotional strength to get themselves through the day.
* Children and young people who have low mood and ADHD may be more at risk of taking their own lives. This is because children with ADHD are more impulsive than children without ADHD, so are more likely to act ‘in the moment’ when they feel down or hopeless. It is important to take talk of hopelessness, despair, or taking their own life seriously and take immediate steps to seek help.

What things can help?

* **Pay attention to changes in mood and behaviour** – look for changes in eating and sleeping patterns and take notes on what you see. Notes can help see if changes in appetite or sleeping are due to ADHD medication or underlying low mood.
* **Communicating with the child** – talking to children about how they feel and what is happening in their life will help them feel they are not alone. It can also be helpful for parents and caregivers to keep track of children’s concerns and spot any early signs of low mood.
* **Talking to children’s teachers** – ask if they think your child has been less attentive or acting out more, sad or tired all of the time, not interacting with others, underperforming academically. Teachers and educational support staff may be able to offer suggestions about how parents can help children with their studies.
* **Talking therapies** – therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a type of counselling that is goal-oriented and focussed on problem solving, can be helpful for children with ADHD.
* **Medication** – for some children, medication is effective in helping with the symptoms of low mood. A specialist will be able to advise which is the best medication for a young person, particularly if they are taking ADHD medication as well. Medication is most effective when combined with a talking therapy like CBT.

Useful links and resources

* **Understood** – an information sheet about low mood and depression in children with ADHD. [www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/add-adhd/adhd-and-depression-what-you-need-to-know](http://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/add-adhd/adhd-and-depression-what-you-need-to-know)
* **Mental Health** – A website with lots of useful information about mental health conditions. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/depression](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/depression)
* **Young Minds** – Information about depression and low mood for young people. [www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/depression/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/depression/)

Telephone numbers

* **Front Door Children’s Services –** If you have any concerns about being able to keep any of your children safe. Tel. 0345 2000 109.
* **Care and Connect –** A service for individuals, families, children and young people in North Tyneside which provides advice and support to stay independent and connected with the community. Support is provided by telephone or face to face in community settings. Tel. 0191 643 7474.
* Website – [www.services.northtyneside.gov.uk/sign/Public.Provider.aspx?ID=4](http://www.services.northtyneside.gov.uk/sign/Public.Provider.aspx?ID=4)