

**Navigating depression
and low mood:**
a practical guide for
young people

Our practical guide will provide explanations and practical activities about the following topics:

- What depression and low mood might look like for you
- Why you might be feeling disconnected
- Activities for connecting with yourself and the world around you
- Where to find support for your mental health and wellbeing

What depression and low mood might look like for you

Experiencing feelings of depression or low mood can affect everyone differently, but most young people describe it as having strong negative feelings that don't seem to go away.

These feelings can include sadness, irritability, or even numbness brought on by a lack of feeling. Often, when you are in a state of depression, you may not be able to enjoy the things you would usually like. Some examples might be:

- engaging in hobbies
- going out with friends


You might also find that you frequently feel some of the following symptoms:

- tiredness
- disturbed sleep
- lethargy
- feeling disconnected from others and the world around you
- feeling less good about yourself

Finally, you might find it quite hard to:

- concentrate
- make decisions
- spend time around others

It's almost as if everything feels like it takes too much effort.



Some young people find they can work out why they might be feeling depressed. This could be because of:

- life events like a bereavement, a break up, or a moving home
- being faced with big decisions, such as what to do after you leave school or college
- family and friendship difficulties

For others, depression can have links to past trauma related events, such as:

- abuse
- bullying

However, the cause isn't always obvious. Depression and low mood is commonly brought on by a mixture of many different things.



Understanding why you might be feeling disconnected

Disconnection is a common symptom of depression and can develop when we start to lose touch with the people or things we enjoy and that means a lot to us - particularly if those things have previously been a big part of our identity.

For example, losing interest in sport when you have always thought of yourself as an athletic person can really shake your sense of who you are.

Also considering the feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness that often come with depression, it's easy to see how you might lose touch with your sense of yourself and feel quite disconnected.



Short activities you might find helpful

We recognise that experiencing depression and feeling disconnected can be really difficult and likely won't disappear overnight. However, we've put together a few practical activities that might be a helpful starting point in coping with these difficult feelings.

Create your own support base checklist

If you struggle with depression, it can sometimes feel like a lot of effort to be around other people - especially if you feel like you have to pretend that everything's fine, or if other people just don't seem to understand.

You may also struggle with those self-critical thoughts telling you that others don't really like you, or that you're better off on your own. All of these things can cause us to withdraw, which can feel safer at first, but, unfortunately, this often means we become more disconnected over time.

Activity: You can start by writing down the names of a few people and groups (online or face to face) that you can reach out to when you're feeling like you need support. This can be your own support base checklist that you can return to anytime you need it.

Considering if there are any friends, people or groups that might be able to listen to you and understand without any judgement can be really effective and powerful. You may also find that you begin to get back in touch with things you once found fulfilling or enjoyable.



Consider what you value most

If you are struggling with low mood and disconnection, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed by demands and to find it hard to get motivated to do anything at all. If this is the case for you, it might be helpful to consider one or two things that you really value, so that you can use your time and energy wisely.

Activity: One way to approach this could be to write down every “should” thought that you are having. These thoughts might be things like:

- “I should be getting better grades”
- “I should be a caring person”
- “I should spend more time with friends or family”
- “I should be more adventurous”

Once you’ve done that, start to examine which of these are genuinely important to you. If you had to put them in order, which would be of most value to you in your life?

Are some of your “shoulds” more important to those around you than yourself? Can you let any of them go? Sometimes, we can surprise ourselves when we really think about what we want for our own lives.



Write a letter to yourself

Writing a letter to yourself can be a powerful tool for meaningful reflection. It helps you to recognise the problems you're facing, and to reconnect with the strengths inside you that you might be struggling to see.

As you go through your day-to-day life, you might notice the inner voice in your head can start to become harsh or critical. Just as if you were being spoken to by a real life bully, a self-critical inner voice can leave you feeling ashamed, which only serves to keep you feeling low in the long run. Moving from a self-critical to a self-compassionate inner voice can take practice, so writing yourself a compassionate, caring letter is a great place to start.

Activity: To do this, imagine you're writing a deeply caring letter to a friend who is struggling. If you find you slip into self-critical mode while you write, gently remind yourself that you're not judging yourself harshly, but instead, responding with understanding. You could write something like...

"Dear Jo, I am writing to you because I know you're really struggling at the moment, and I wanted to reach out. I think you have been brave for so long that it's understandable you are feeling overwhelmed and a bit down at the moment. I'm sorry you're feeling this way and want you to know that I see how hard you are trying..."

Once you've written your letter, read it back to yourself slowly (in your head or out loud), so that you can connect with any feelings this brings up for you.



Support is available

You can check if Kooth is available in your area by visiting kooth.com and selecting “**Join Kooth**” to get started. Here are some reasons you may want to join:

- We’re completely free to use.
- You’re anonymous to us.
- No bullying or trolling takes place on our site.
- You don’t need any kind of referral to join.
- Signing up and getting started only takes a few minutes.

No problem is too small.

If Kooth isn’t available in your area and you need support, we recommend exploring the following support options:

- [SHOUT](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [Samaritans](#)

