

Signs of depression or anxiety in children

Knowing how to talk to a child about their mental health, or recognising the signs that they might be struggling, can be really hard. Signs of depression or anxiety in children can sometimes look like normal behaviour, particularly in teenagers who can keep their feelings to themselves. It's also natural for children or young people to feel stressed or anxious about things like exams or moving to a new school. But while these experiences can be very difficult, they're different from longer term depression or anxiety, which affect how a child or young person feels every day. It can help to think about what's normal for the child and if you've noticed signs that they've been behaving differently recently.

Signs of depression in children and teenagers can include:

persistent low-mood or lack of motivation

not enjoying things they used to like doing

becoming withdrawn and spending less time with friends and family

experiencing low self-esteem or feeling like they are 'worthless'

feeling tearful or upset regularly

changes in eating or sleeping habits.

Helping a child with anxiety or depression

Realising that a child may be struggling with their mental health and experiencing anxiety or depression can be hard to accept. Sometimes parents can feel like it's their fault or want to know why their child is struggling with a mental health problem. This is completely understandable, but the most important thing you can do is to reassure the child and not judge them for how they're feeling.

letting them know you are on their side

listen

being patient and staying calm and approachable, even if their behaviour upsets you

recognising that their feelings are valid and letting them know it's okay for them to be honest about what it's like for them to feel this way

thinking of healthy ways to cope, like yoga, breathing exercises or mindfulness

encouraging them to talk to their GP, someone at their school or Childline. Especially if they're finding it hard to talk at home.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>