



DEPRESSION POLICY

Introduction

This policy outlines the College's response to managing a student presenting with depression whilst the student is in school. The policy serves to assist the student and their parents in the management of their depression as well as helping Housemasters/mistresses', the Medical Centre staff and other teachers understand how to help the individual concerned.

Definition of clinical depression

Depression is a common mental health disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep and/or changes of appetite, low energy and poor concentration.

It is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether an individual is just feeling sad or miserable; everyone's mood will change during the day and from day to day. It is important to recognise that depression is a widely, and often incorrectly used word and as a result its meaning has become somewhat confused. Young people today may talk about being "depressed" when they are actually disappointed, fed up or feeling sad. True depression is when there is *consistent* low mood and a loss of interest and self-worth.

It is often present out of proportion to any precipitating factors or even without any external cause. Whilst it is important to identify any causal or contributory factors, these should not be seen as a requirement for diagnosis.

Possible causes of depression amongst adolescents

- Difficulty negotiating being a teenager;
- Experiencing more than their fair share of situational crises;
- Specific individual characteristics such as low self-esteem and perfectionism;
- Specific family characteristics (other family members suffering mental health problems or a history of suicide in the family);
- Alcoholism or drug use by with young person or within their family;
- Sexual or physical abuse patterns in the family;
- How easily they relate socially to peers;
- Physical illness and medication;
- Being bullied;
- Experiencing a bereavement;
- Relationship difficulties with their families or peers.

Supporting pupils with depression

Anxiety and depression are serious problems for teenagers. Teachers are well placed to notice the changes caused by anxiety and depression. Common features of anxiety and depression include:

- Tension;
- Worry;
- Frustration;
- Irritability;
- Sadness;
- Withdrawal;
- Isolation;
- Worthlessness.

Young people do not often express their anxiety or depression in a straightforward way and can show they are affected through passive or negative behaviours – they may appear disinterested or their behaviour may become more attention-seeking in style. Such changes can be picked up effectively by teachers, tutors and Housemaster/mistresses. All members of staff working at the College should also be aware that they may be the first port of call for a young person who may wish to speak about their feelings for the first time.

Epsom College in Malaysia also has a safeguarding and child protection responsibility to deal as quickly and appropriately as possible with presenting mental health problems and any situation in which the wellbeing of an individual student is threatened.

Identifying teenage depression at school may be difficult but some of the **warning signs** include:

Behaviour

- Changes in school performance – a change in effort grades / not handing in the same quality work;
- Loss of concentration;
- Slow performance;
- Difficulty sticking to deadlines;
- Withdrawal from friends and activities;
- Absent from school more and not wanting to return to school on a Sunday evening (if a Boarder);
- Lack of engagement;
- May become more challenging behaviourally;
- Skipping lessons and making excuses;
- Self-harm;
- Risky behaviour – e.g. excessive drinking at the weekend;
- Obsessive behaviour;
- Over or under activity in particular tasks;
- Neglect of appearance.

Physical factors:

- Changes in weight and appetite;
- May avoid physical activity;
- Appears tired and without energy;
- May present with a lot more physical illness, aches and pains, absences from school due to illness.

Psychological changes:

- Looks sad and withdrawn;
- Less able to concentrate;
- Memory changes;
- Reduced motor speed;
- Easily irritable and angry;
- More easily tearful.

Social factors:

- Friends may present with concerns;
- Withdrawal from social group;
- Forming new and transient friendships;
- Not joining in any social activities;
- Not contributing in group work or in class.

The flow chart below should be followed if you have concerns about a pupil, if another pupil raises concerns about one of their friends or if an individual pupil speaks to you specifically about how they are feeling.

It should be noted that the symptoms highlighted above may be apparent in young people where anxiety rather than depression would be the key issue. It is therefore vitally important that if a member of staff has concerns they speak to a professional.

