Depression – for friends, family and supports

What is Depression
Depression is a prolonged and persistent negative mood that can interfere with many aspects of a person’s life and can include feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, excessive guilt and hopelessness. Negative thoughts might also include suicidal ideation or thoughts of self harm.

Depression is serious when the symptoms are present most of the time and are having a serious impact on a person’s life. People at the severe end of the spectrum tend to experience more physical symptoms. When depressive feelings persist for 2 weeks or more and interfere with one’s health and social well-being, then some sort of intervention or professional help is needed.

Signs and symptoms of depression
Depression can have a range of symptoms including physical ones. Below are some things you might notice about someone if they are experiencing depression.

They seem:
- down, unhappy, flat or sad
- to have lost of interest in most things, including activities previously enjoyed
- unmotivated and unable to do things in the timeframe or to the level of quality that they have previously been able to achieve
- irritable or easily frustrated
- less confident, or are talking in a way that indicates feelings of hopelessness or helplessness (e.g. “what’s the point?”, “I only make things worse”)
- to be focussing on the negatives of most situations, or
- expressing feelings of excessive guilt

- tired and lethargic most of the time
- to be slower in speech or in the time taken to respond to conversation
- to be eating more or less than usual
- have evidently gained or lost weight
- complaining of aches and pains
- to have difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- to be neglecting responsibilities and personal appearance
- to be withdrawn and withdrawing from people or situations
- They are using drugs and/or alcohol

Things you might hear when someone is not okay:
- “I'm not feeling well”
- “Well, I’m alive”
- “I'm just out of it today”
- “I'm hanging in there”
- “I’m just tired”
- “I’m just having a rough time at the moment”
- “I’m all good, don’t worry about it”
- “I’m okay” (unconvincingly)
How to help a person who is depressed
A person may become depressed when they believe that their problems are too overwhelming for them to cope with alone. Reaching out can be help a person get the support they need.

- Do a little research ahead of time. The RU OK? website is a good place to start for conversational guides.
- Let them know you are concerned and mention specific things that have made you concerned (e.g. “you seem less chatty” or “I haven’t seen you around as much”)
- Be supportive, patient and listen to their concerns and let them know you will support them the best way you can. Ask them how they think you can help them
- Don’t tell a depressed person that you know what they are feeling, or offer ‘quick fixes’ (i.e. “you just need to…”)

- Ask the person what they need right now. Try to avoid alcohol as this might exacerbate
- Encourage the person to seek professional help. You can even offer to support the person with the process of connecting to a support service.
- If the person doesn’t want to talk, let them know you are concerned and care about them. If you are happy to chat with them at a later point in time, let them know this and how to contact you.
- Check in with the person a day or two, or a week later.

Recognising when someone is at risk of suicide
For very depressed individuals, suicide can seem like their only option. Some signs of depression and possibly suicidal behaviour to be aware of includes when the person:

- Seems very sad, lonely or negative in conversation, and say things like “the world/my family/people would be better off without me”
- Has a marked change in behaviour. They might stop socialising and/or attending classes, or are suddenly very cheerful after being depressed for a while.
- Says they are sleeping or eating too much or too little

- Suddenly stops performing/handling in their assignments
- Gives away their possessions or finalises things
- Is feeling like their problems are too big, or that no one can help
- Is using drugs/alcohol excessively
- Is no longer taking care of their appearance
- Is talking about death, or when he/she will no longer be around

A depressed person may share their suicidal thoughts with a friend, lecturer, tutor or another significant person in their life. This may be a subtle (or obvious) message – it is in most cases a cry for help and should be taken seriously. If you are concerned that someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts the following steps may be taken:

Do
- Ask if the person is feeling suicidal. It may be a great relief for them to talk about it – it will NOT make them commit suicide.
- Seek professional help and support – don’t attempt to handle the situation on your own. You can contact the University Counselling Service to discuss your concerns or talk to someone close to them who can help.
- Take them seriously.
- Discuss their plans and feelings as openly as possible with them.

DON’T
- Keep their feelings secret – breaking their confidence may keep them alive.
- Dare them to carry out their intentions or simplify the issue by saying “you just need to”
- Tell them they don’t mean it.
- Ignore the message – discuss with them their plans and intentions as openly as possible, and take their comments seriously.
- Leave it up to them to get the professional help they need.
Where can I get more information or help?
There are a number of places that you can get more information if you are worried that someone you know might have depression.

**University Counselling Service:** [utas.edu.au/counselling](utas.edu.au/counselling)
Free personal counselling (face-to-face, video, phone, instant chat and email) appointments are available with experienced mental health clinicians between 8.30am and 5.00pm weekdays.
Online bookings: [utas.edu.au/appointments](utas.edu.au/appointments)
Phone: 1800 817 675
After Hours Crisis counselling support phone 1300 511 709 or text 0488 884 168

**R U OK?**
This website includes helpful information about what to think about ahead of a conversations with someone you are concerned about. It also has some tips of how to ask if someone is okay. [www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask](www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask)

**Conversations Matter:** [conversationsmatter.com.au](conversationsmatter.com.au)
Information and resources for individuals, families, professionals and community groups to help with conversations around suicide.

**Black Dog Institute:** [blackdoginstitute.org.au](blackdoginstitute.org.au)
Information and resources for professionals and individuals interested in learning more about mental health and wellness.

**Suicide Call-Back Service:** [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](suicidecallbackservice.org.au)
National 24/7 service offering free phone and online counselling for people living in Australia affected by suicide. This includes people feeling suicidal, worried about someone, supporting someone or who have lost someone to suicide.
Phone: 1300 659 467

**Beyond Blue:** [beyondblue.org.au](beyondblue.org.au)
Free information and support people around mental health and wellbeing. Includes online chat service.
Phone 1300 22 46 36

**Headspace:** [headspace.org.au](headspace.org.au)
Information, resources and support for people 25 years and under. Includes online information, chat and phone support through eheadspace, as well as face-to-face service at a centre near you.

**References**
APS Tip Sheet, Australian Psychological Society, 2014

We would like to acknowledge our gratitude and appreciation for the ideas and information borrowed from the University of Buffalo (USA), Massey University (NZ), ‘Beyond Blue’ and ‘R U OK?’ fact sheets.