

Sadness or something more?

A teen worksheet for understanding sadness vs. depression

Everyone feels sad sometimes. Sadness is a normal emotion that can happen after a disappointment, loss, conflict, stressful experience or difficult day.

Depression is different. It often extends beyond a single situation and can continue even when you cannot identify a specific reason.

This worksheet isn't a test or a diagnosis. It's a way to pause, notice what you've been experiencing and decide whether talking with someone might be helpful.



1 What have I been experiencing?

Think about the past two weeks. Check anything you've noticed.

MY MOOD

- ☐ I've felt sad, down or empty much of the time.
- ☐ I've been more irritable or angry than usual.
- ☐ I've felt numb or like I don't really care about anything.
- ☐ I've felt hopeless about things getting better.
- ☐ I've been unusually emotional or tearful.

MY INTEREST & MOTIVATION

- ☐ I've lost interest in things I normally enjoy.
- ☐ Hanging out with friends doesn't feel as enjoyable.
- ☐ I've stopped doing activities I usually like.
- ☐ Even small things feel like a lot of effort.
- ☐ I've had trouble motivating myself to do things.

MY BODY

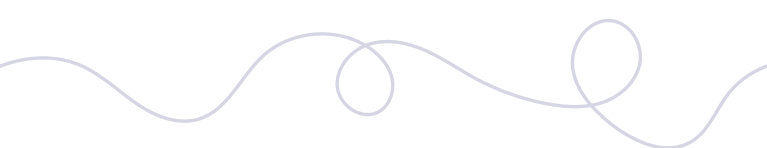
- ☐ I've been much more tired or drained than usual.
- ☐ I've been sleeping much more or less.
- ☐ My appetite or eating patterns have changed.
- ☐ I've noticed unexplained headaches, stomachaches or other physical discomfort.

MY THINKING

- ☐ I've had trouble concentrating.
- ☐ I've been thinking negatively about myself.
- ☐ I've felt like I'm not good enough.
- ☐ I've been feeling guilty about things that aren't really my fault.
- ☐ I've had trouble imagining things getting better.

MY LIFE

- ☐ School has become harder to manage.
- ☐ I've been pulling away from friends or family.
- ☐ I've been spending more time alone.
- ☐ I've had difficulty keeping up with everyday responsibilities.
- ☐ People close to me have noticed that I've changed.



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Sadness vs. depression

There isn't one perfect way to tell the difference, but these prompts can help you notice patterns.

SADNESS

I can usually identify what made me sad.

My sadness comes and goes.

I can still enjoy some things.

Talking to someone or doing something I enjoy can help.

My mood gradually improves.

I can mostly keep up with school and everyday life.

The sadness fits with something that happened.

COULD BE A SIGN OF DEPRESSION

I feel down even when I can't identify a specific reason.

I feel sad, numb or irritable most days.

Things I normally enjoy don't feel enjoyable anymore.

Nothing seems to make much of a difference.

My mood isn't improving or seems to be getting worse.

My mood is making school, relationships or daily life harder.

My feelings seem much bigger, longer lasting or harder to explain.

Remember: Feeling sad doesn't automatically mean you're depressed, and depression doesn't always involve feeling sad. Some teens experience depression mainly as irritability, anger, exhaustion, numbness or losing interest in things they normally enjoy.

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Check in with yourself

HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN FEELING DIFFERENT?

- ☐ A few hours
- ☐ A few days
- ☐ Around two weeks
- ☐ More than two weeks
- ☐ I'm not sure

HOW MUCH IS THIS AFFECTING MY LIFE?

0 = Not at all 10 = A lot

My mood: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

School: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Friendships/family: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Things I normally enjoy: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WHAT I THINK I NEED RIGHT NOW:

- ☐ Someone to listen
- ☐ Time to rest
- ☐ Connection with friends/family
- ☐ Help with school or responsibilities
- ☐ Help figuring out what's going on
- ☐ Professional support
- ☐ I'm not sure yet



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When should I reach out for support?

You don't have to figure out whether you "really" have depression before asking for help.

Consider talking with a trusted adult, doctor, counselor or mental health professional if:

- ☐ I've been feeling this way for two or more weeks.
- ☐ My feelings are getting worse.
- ☐ I'm losing interest in things I normally enjoy.
- ☐ My mood is interfering with school, relationships or everyday life.
- ☐ I'm withdrawing from the people I care about.
- ☐ I'm having a hard time taking care of myself or keeping up with responsibilities.
- ☐ I don't understand why I feel this way and I want help figuring it out.

One person I could talk to is: _____

Something I could say: "I've been feeling different lately, and I think I could use some help."

If you're having thoughts of suicide

Sometimes depression can bring thoughts like **"I don't want to be here"** or **"I can't do this anymore."** You don't have to handle those thoughts alone.

IF THIS IS HAPPENING TO YOU:

1. **Tell someone.** Reach out to a parent, caregiver, trusted adult, teacher, counselor, coach or another person you trust.
2. **Stay connected.** Try not to isolate yourself. Stay near supportive people while you're having a hard time.
3. **Get professional support.** A doctor, therapist or mental health professional can help you figure out what you're experiencing and what support you need.
4. **If you feel you may act on these thoughts or cannot stay safe:**
Call or text **988** to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or call **911** / go to the nearest emergency department.

You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with Crisis Text Line.

You're not alone: Having suicidal thoughts is a sign that you need support, not a sign that you have failed. You deserve help, and things can get better.

