



Experiencing
LOW MOOD
for International
Students



SUPPORTING
DISCUSSIONS
WITH STUDENTS



Experiencing Low Mood

Supporting Discussions with Students

Overview

This document is for educators, school counsellors, international student program staff, and other adults supporting international students' wellbeing. It is an accompaniment to the *Low Mood worksheet for students* and meant to facilitate discussions with students who seem "down."

It is normal for students to feel sad or low from time to time. For international students, far from home and experiencing homesickness or acculturation stress, this can be particularly true. However, if a low mood persists beyond a few weeks or impacts their ability to function, the student may be suffering from depression.

Depression is a common and treatable mood disorder, a form of mental illness. It is estimated that as many as 8% of teens experience depression (School Mental Health Ontario, 2019). While there are signs and symptoms you can look for, depression can only be diagnosed by a medical professional.

Working collaboratively with your district's/school's psychologists, school counsellors, social-emotional learning, and mental health leads will ensure that international students experiencing low mood or depression get the best possible support.

KEY POINTS

- *If a low mood persists for more than two weeks and impacts the student's ability to function, they may be depressed. A diagnosis of depression can only be made by a medical professional.*
- *Teachers and international student program staff are not mental health professionals. However, they play a crucial role in recognizing shifts in mood in a student and noticing when these fluctuations are out of character. Their ongoing support can also make a big difference for a student struggling with a mood problem.*
- *Depression affects one's appetite, sleep patterns and concentration. It can also lead to feelings of guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness and, in severe cases, self-harm or suicide.*
- *Depression is usually caused by a combination of factors and cannot always be prevented. However, the risk is reduced when students have social connections, a sense of belonging and purpose, and constructive and adaptive ways of coping with their problems.*
- *Depression is treatable, but it is not something that people can "get over" by their own effort. A person's ability and willingness to get treatment affects the length of the depression. Timely treatment is essential as it minimizes disruptions to students' education.*
- *Everyday practices and skill-building can help all students maintain or improve their mood.*
- *Learning, and mental health leads will ensure that international students experiencing low mood or depression get the best possible support.*

Noticing Signs of Mood Problems

The first step in supporting a student with a low mood is to notice and recognize the problem. The table below outlines what to look for.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT OBSERVE	THINGS STUDENTS MAY DESCRIBE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sad mood, tearfulness</i>• <i>Irritability, quick to anger</i>• <i>Lack of interest and involvement in previously enjoyed activities</i>• <i>Difficulty concentrating on tasks/activities, forgetfulness, inattention</i>• <i>Decreased academic performance and follow-through on tasks</i>• <i>Hypersensitivity (e.g., cries easily, overreacts to small issues)</i>• <i>Impulsive and risky behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Changes in appetite</i>• <i>Changes in sleep patterns</i>• <i>Physical complaints (aches and pains)</i>• <i>Sense of boredom</i>• <i>Feelings of low self-worth</i>• <i>Substance use</i>• <i>Impulsive and risky behaviour</i>• <i>Suicidal thoughts and behaviours</i>

School Mental Health Ontario, 2019

→ Using the Low Mood Worksheet

Use this document and the student-focused *Low Mood worksheet* to support collaborative discussions with students who appear to be experiencing a low mood. This document will guide you to learn more about what's going on for the student, provide everyday mental health strategies and assess whether they need additional support from healthcare professionals or others. The student worksheet will provide the student with the main points and encourage them to make plans to support their wellbeing.

Working through the worksheet can be done in one sitting or over time, and it is not necessary to follow any particular order. However, to ensure that the student is safe and supported, it is essential that you:


- Have a better understanding of how severe their low mood might be. i.e., how long the student has been feeling down, whether their ability to function is impaired, and symptoms they may be experiencing
- Know if they have been experiencing suicidal or other thoughts of self-harm.

Make sure to check in on the student at a later date. You can use the worksheet to discuss plans and progress.

The Worksheet

Knowing If It's More Than Low Mood

KNOWING IF IT'S MORE THAN LOW MOOD



Only a doctor can diagnose depression. But, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If it persists and you have much less energy than usual, feel like nothing matters and that it will never get better; you may be depressed and need to get help.

Experiencing Low Mood

We all feel sad or down from time to time. Problems, disappointments, and losses can affect anyone's mood. These feelings are usually temporary. But when a low mood goes on for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sadness so severe that it interferes with school, friends, and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.

KNOWING IF IT'S MORE THAN LOW MOOD	TIPS	YOUR PLAN
KNOWING IF IT'S MORE THAN LOW MOOD Only a doctor can diagnose depression. But, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If it persists and you have much less energy than usual, feel like nothing matters and that it will never get better; you may be depressed and need to get help.	TIPS It's important to talk to an adult you trust if you notice new and ongoing changes in your mood, thoughts and/or actions. They can help you get the help you need.	YOUR PLAN How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____ How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____
BOOST YOUR MOOD BY BEING ACTIVE Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels, and mental health. It gives you time away from your worries and makes you focus on what you're doing. It improves blood flow, releases some chemicals, and gives your body what it needs to feel good.	TIPS To feel even better every day, don't cancel things. If you get off the bus a stop or two early and walk the rest of the way, it can make a big difference.	YOUR PLAN How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____
RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Get yourself permission to spend time doing something fun. It might be reading, watching the sunset, or spending time with friends who can distract you from how they're feeling.	TIPS Activities that lower your stress can help you cope with low mood and depression. Try yoga, tai chi, meditation or listening to your favorite music.	YOUR PLAN How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____
SLEEP LESS THAN AND OTHER HEALTHY HABITS Managing stress and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's harder to be optimistic or deal with problems. Eating healthy meals and keeping your movement routine can help. 7 hours a day can also help you cope better.	TIPS Get into a sleep routine. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day—including weekends. Being consistent helps your body know when to sleep.	YOUR PLAN How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____
GETTING IMMEDIATE HELP If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm or death, you need to talk to a trusted adult right away. Feeling down or depressed is common, treatable and you can feel so much better. Please reach out to help you. It's always OK to ask for help.	TIPS Get free, confidential, mental health support 24/7 through Interoceanic Child Health: 1-800-488-1313 (texted in NC: 724-6739) or see your doctor.	YOUR PLAN How do I feel about this? _____ What do I need to do? _____

EXPERIENCING LOW MOOD WORKSHEET FOR STUDENTS

Your Goal for This Worksheet Section

- To deepen your understanding of how the student is feeling and the source of the problem.
- To determine if the issue needs to be escalated to engage medical or other supports.
- To determine if they have trusted adults they can reach out to when they have a problem. If not, to help them identify one or more.
- To encourage them to continue to reach out to trusted adults for support.

Listen to Learn More About How They Are Feeling

- Most students are resilient and bounce back quickly from low moods. Knowing more about how they are feeling will help you and the student decide how best to support them. The questions below can help you learn more.

- When did the student begin feeling low or sad?
 - Two weeks or more of low mood is of concern.

- Do they know why they are feeling down?
 - In some cases, stress or an adverse event may trigger a low mood. In other cases, the cause may be less apparent.
 - Depression has been linked to homesickness and acculturation stress. Exploring how the student is adapting to their new school and environment might provide additional insights.
- What other symptoms are they experiencing?
 - Depression can have a variety of signs and symptoms, and they will vary from person to person.
 - Discussion with the student will help identify their visible and more hidden symptoms. You are looking for **changes** from the student's usual routines or habits. Note the symptoms they are experiencing without jumping to conclusions.

- Typical symptoms of depression include:
 - Sadness or irritability that affects the student’s ability to function and lasts most of the day, every day
 - Changes in appetite and weight
 - Sleep problems, either too much or too little
 - Loss of interest in school, hobbies, people
 - Loss of feeling for family members and friends
 - Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, excessive guilt
 - A fixation on inadequacies and a loss of self-esteem
 - Feelings of restlessness or agitation, or being too tired and weak to do anything
 - Slowed thinking, forgetfulness, trouble concentrating and making decisions
 - A tendency to cry easily, or wanting to cry but being unable to do so
 - Suicidal or occasionally homicidal thoughts
 - In some cases, losing touch with reality, possibly hallucinations or delusions.
- Is their low mood impacting their ability to function at school, at home or with friends?
 - A low mood that impacts a student’s ability to function and carry out their daily activities is more concerning.
 - Explore the ways that the student’s ability to function is impacted.

Discussion Points

- It’s normal to have ups and downs in your moods.
- When a low mood stays for a long time or affects your day-to-day life, it could be something more serious, like depression. A doctor can determine if it is.
- Trusted adults can help you deal with your low mood.
- If there seems to be stigma around mental health or mental health treatment, offer further reassurance.
- Depression is a common illness, and people of all ages and backgrounds can have it. They get treatment and recover.

• In Canada, we think of depression in the same way we think of a broken leg. We go to the doctor and get treatment so we can get better. Getting treatment is completely normal.

Actions

Discuss who the trusted adults are that the student is comfortable talking to about this. Also, explore how low mood and/or depression is typically addressed in their home country. Who would be helping them deal with this at home, and what advice would that person likely give them? Asking these questions can provide insights into culturally appropriate strategies to support them.

Boost Your Mood by Being Active

BOOST YOUR MOOD BY BEING ACTIVE



Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels and mental health. It gives you time away from your worries and makes you focus on what you're doing. It improves blood flow, relaxes tense muscles, and fills your body with feel-good chemicals.

Experiencing Low Mood

We all feel sad or down from time to time. Problems, disappointments, and losses can affect anyone's mood. These feelings are usually temporary, but when a low mood goes on for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sadness so severe that it interferes with school, friends and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.

DEPRESSION WITH LOW MOOD AND DISTRESS

SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR IN LOW MOOD	TIPS	YOUR PLAN
<p>Only a doctor can diagnose depression. But, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If it persists and you have much less energy than usual, feel like nothing matters and that it will never get better, you may be depressed and need help.</p>	<p>It's important to talk to an adult you trust if you notice new and ongoing changes in your mood, thoughts, mood, actions. They can help you get the help you need.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>BOOST YOUR MOOD BY BEING ACTIVE</p> <p>Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels and mental health. It gives you time away from your worries and makes you focus on what you're doing. It improves blood flow, relaxes tense muscles, and fills your body with feel-good chemicals.</p>	<p>Try to get some exercise every day, even small changes, like getting off the bus a stop or two early and walking for the rest of the way can make a big difference.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY</p> <p>It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Give yourself permission to spend time doing something fun. It might be reading, watching the sunset, or spending time with friends who can distract you from a bad day - whatever makes you feel happy.</p>	<p>Activities that lower your stress can help you cope with low mood and depression. Try yoga, tai chi, meditation or listening to your favourite music.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>SLEEP, SCHOOL TIPS AND OTHER HEALTHY HABITS</p> <p>Managing stress and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's hard to be optimistic or deal with problems. Doing healthy meals and limiting your recreational screen time to 2 hours a day can also help you report better.</p>	<p>Get into a sleep routine. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day - including weekends. Having a screen curfew 1 hour before bedtime will improve your sleep.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>GETTING SUPPORT AND HELP</p> <p>If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm or death, you must talk to a trusted adult right away. Asking about professional resources, medication and so on has no age or gender restrictions. People want to help you. It's always OK to ask for help.</p>	<p>Get free, confidential, mental health support 24/7 through Interim's Student Health. 1-888-483-3333 (toll-free) or 249-222-2222 (if you are in school).</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

EXPERIENCING LOW MOOD WORKSHEET FOR STUDENTS

Discussion Points

- Physical activity helps elevate mood, including for those suffering from depression.
- Being active is important for all students. Health Canada recommends that teens get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day, with vigorous physical activities and muscle and bone-strengthening activities on at least three days per week.



Tip

People suffering from more severe forms of depression may be limited in what they can do, so adjust expectations accordingly. For some students, a 10-minute walk could be an accomplishment.

Actions

Encourage the student to commit to a realistic activity plan, however modest.

Relax and Do Things You Enjoy






RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY



It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Give yourself permission to spend time doing something fun. It might be reading, watching the sunset, or spending time with friends who can distract you from a bad day – whatever makes you feel happy.

Experiencing Low Mood

We all feel sad or down from time to time. Problems, disappointments, and losses can affect anyone's mood. These feelings are usually temporary, but when a low mood goes on for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sadness so severe that it interferes with school, friends and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.

WORKING TO STABILIZE YOUR LOW MOOD	TIPS	YOUR PLAN
 <p>Only a doctor can diagnose depression. But, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If it persists and you have much less energy than usual, but like nothing matters and that it will never get better, you may be depressed and need to get help.</p>	<p>It's important to talk to an adult you trust if you notice new and ongoing changes in your mood, thoughts, mood, actions. They can help you get the help you need.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>Boost your mood by being active. Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels, and mental health. It gives you time away from your worries and makes you focus on what you're doing. It releases endorphins, releases some muscles, and it improves blood flow.</p>	<p>Try to get some exercise every day. Even small changes, like getting off the bus to stop or ten more steps make a big difference.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY. It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Give yourself permission to spend time doing something fun. It might be reading, watching the sunset, or spending time with friends who can distract you from a bad day – whatever makes you feel happy.</p>	<p>Activities that lower your stress can help you cope with low mood and depression. Try yoga, tai chi, meditation or listening to your favourite music.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>LESS SLEEP CAN FEEL WORSE THAN OTHER HABITS. Staying stressed and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's hard to be optimistic or deal with problems. Doing healthy meals and limiting your recreational screen time to 2 hours a day can also help you sleep better.</p>	<p>Get into a sleep routine. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day – including weekends. Having a screen curfew 1 hour before bedtime will improve your sleep.</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>GETTING SUPPORTIVE HELP. If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm or death, you must talk to a trusted adult right away. Asking about it doesn't mean you're weak, it means you're strong and you have to go through it alone. People want to help you. It's always OK to ask for help.</p>	<p>Get free, confidential, mental health support 24/7 through Interpersonnel Support Helpline. 1-888-485-3111 (toll-free) or 247-2100 (toll-free) or visit www.ontario.ca/247</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

EXPERIENCING LOW MOOD WORKSHEET FOR STUDENTS

Discussion Points

- Activities that lower stress can help deal with depression. Practices like mindfulness, yoga, and tai chi can be helpful for some people. Refer to the *Feeling Stressed worksheet* for additional suggestions.
- Hobbies, interests and other activities can also help students relax and have a break from their worries.
- While some people intuitively withdraw from others when they feel low, spending time with people they care about can help lift a student's mood.

Actions

Encourage the student to note some specific relaxing activities that they plan to do in the next week.

Sleep, Screen Time and Other Healthy Habits

SLEEP, SCREEN TIME AND OTHER HEALTHY HABITS



Managing stress and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's hard to be optimistic or deal with problems. Eating healthy meals and limiting your recreational screen time to time to 2 hours a day can also help you cope better.

Experiencing Low Mood

We all feel sad or down from time to time. Problems, disappointments, and losses can affect anyone's mood. These feelings are usually temporary. But when a low mood goes on for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sickness so severe that it interferes with school, friends, and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.

DEALING WITH LOW MOOD AND DEPRESSION	TIPS	YOUR PLAN
KNOWING IF IT'S MORE THAN A LOW MOOD Only a doctor can diagnose depression. But, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If it persists and you have much less energy than usual, feel like eating, notice and don't want to get better, you may be depressed and need to get help.	It's important to talk to an adult you trust if you notice new and ongoing changes in your mood, thoughts, and actions. They can help you get the help you need.	How do I ask for help?
BOOST YOUR MOOD BY BEING ACTIVE Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels, and mental health. If you can't exercise, try some simple activities like walking, stretching, or dancing. It improves blood flow, releases some muscles, and lifts your mood and has great benefits.	Try to get some exercise every day. Even small changes, like getting off the bus a stop or two early and walking the rest of the way, can make a big difference.	My activity plan:
RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Get parental permission to spend time alone, watching TV, or spending time with friends who can distract you from a bad day—whatever makes you happy.	Activities that lower your stress can help you cope with low mood and depression. Try yoga, tai chi, meditation or listening to your favourite music.	How do I relax?
SLEEP, SCREEN TIME AND OTHER HEALTHY HABITS Managing stress and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's hard to be optimistic or deal with problems. Eating healthy meals and limiting your recreational screen time to 2 hours a day can also help you cope better.	Get into a sleep routine. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day— including weekends. Avoid screens for at least 1 hour before bedtime and improve your sleep.	My sleep routine:
If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm, or death, you need to talk to a trusted adult right away. Calling a doctor or counselor is common, available anytime and free or through a school. Please want to help you. It's always OK to ask for help.	Get help, confidential, mental health support ASK THROUGH INTERPERSONAL SKILLS (ASKING) (Interpersonal Council of Health) 1-800-488-1111 (Available in BC, 24/7) (If you are outside)	In case of an emergency:

Discussion Points

- Students 14—17 years old need 8 to 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night, with consistent bed and wake-up times.
- Sleep and mood are linked. Sleep issues are a common symptom of low mood and depression. Research has also confirmed that insufficient sleep negatively affects the mood of adolescents.
- Reflect on the student's sleep habits, including:
 - Whether they are getting enough sleep
 - Whether their bed and waking times are consistent
 - Whether they are experiencing disruptions in their sleep patterns
 - Whether their technology use might be interfering with their sleep.
- If the student is experiencing sleep disruptions, explore strategies they might use to improve their sleep. (See [Resources](#) section).
- Maintaining a healthy diet with a healthy breakfast, regular mealtimes, and limited junk food can help keep a student's mood and energy levels steady.
- Reflect on the student's eating habits, including:
 - Whether they are skipping meals
 - Whether they are mostly eating nutritious food,

or instead, are filling up on sugary or other junk foods, which give a quick energy burst followed by a drop in energy.

- If appropriate, explore strategies to improve their diet.
- Canada's recommended guideline for recreational screen time for children and youth is no more than two hours per day.
- Technology use can be a double-edged sword for international students. On the one hand, it allows them to maintain strong connections with family and friends at home. On the other hand, excessive screen time is linked with depression. Spending too much time on technology can take time away from the things that students need, like getting enough sleep, face-to-face time with others, and time in nature.
- Reflect on the student's technology usage, particularly in the evening and night, when it may interfere with sleep.


Actions

If appropriate, based on the discussion, encourage the student to make plans for any or all of the following:

- Improving their sleep habits
- Improving their technology use
- Limiting their recreational screen time.

Getting Immediate Help

GETTING IMMEDIATE HELP



*If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm or death, you must talk to a trusted adult **right away**. Feeling down or depressed is common, treatable and no one has to go through it alone. People want to help you. **It's always OK to ask for help.***

Experiencing Low Mood

We all feel sad or down from time to time. Problems, disappointments, and losses can affect anyone's mood. These feelings are usually temporary. But when a low mood goes on for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sickness so severe that it interferes with school, friends and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.

DEALING WITH LOW MOODS AND DEPRESSION

TIPS	YOUR PLAN
<p>FIGURING OUT IT'S HARD TO FEEL LOW MOOD</p> <p>Only a doctor can diagnose depression. So, if you only feel down for a week or 2, it's likely a low mood. If you feel down for more than a few weeks, and other symptoms appear, it could be a sign of depression. Depression is a sickness so severe that it interferes with school, friends and daily activities and prevents you from doing things you usually enjoy.</p>	<p>It's important to talk to an adult you trust if you notice your mood changing and ongoing changes to your mood, thoughts, and actions. They can help you get the help you need.</p> <p><i>Like 27, talk to _____</i></p>
<p>BOOST YOUR MOOD BY BEING ACTIVE</p> <p>Physical activity is great for your mood, stress levels, and overall health. It gives you time away from your worries and makes you focus on what you're doing. It releases mood-lifters, releases some muscles, and fits your body with just good chemicals.</p>	<p>Try to get some exercise every day. Even small changes, like getting off the bus a stop or two early and walking the rest of the way, can make a big difference.</p> <p><i>My activity plan _____</i></p>
<p>RELAX AND DO THINGS YOU ENJOY</p> <p>It can be hard to relax when you are feeling down. Give yourself permission to spend time doing something fun, or might be reading, watching the news, or spending time with friends who can distract you from a bad day - whatever makes you feel happy.</p>	<p>Activities that lower your stress can help you cope with low mood and depression. Try yoga, or other meditation or breathing to your favorite music.</p> <p><i>One 2 talk _____</i></p>
<p>SLEEP, SCREEN TIME, AND OTHER HEALTHY HABITS</p> <p>Managing stress and sleep both have a big effect on your mood. When you are tired, it's hard to be optimistic or deal with problems. Doing healthy meals and having your recreational screen time to help.</p>	<p>Get into a sleep routine. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day - including weekends. Having a consistent 7-hour bedtime routine will improve your mood.</p> <p><i>My sleep routine _____</i></p>
<p>GETTING IMMEDIATE HELP</p> <p>If you're having thoughts of suicide, self-harm or death, you must talk to a trusted adult right away. Feeling down or depressed is common, treatable and no one has to go through it alone. People want to help you. It's always OK to ask for help.</p>	<p>Get free, confidential mental health support 24/7 through Interperson (IM) Support. Call our Crisis Helpline: 1-800-458-3277. Elsewhere in BC: 210-2739. You can also reach _____ in case of a crisis.</p>

Discussion Points

- Suicide and self-harm can be symptoms of depression.
- Even if the student has not had thoughts of self-harm, they must know what to do if that happens.
 - Immediately reach out to a trusted adult for help, or
 - Contact a crisis line that provides confidential 24/7 support, using interpreters who can speak their language.
- Reinforce that it's always OK to ask for help for mental health and other problems.

Actions

If the student has had suicidal thoughts or is self-harming, immediately follow your district/school protocol and notify the International Student Program lead/custodian.

Encourage the student to plan what they will do if they are in a crisis and need help.

Follow-up Actions

After the discussion with the student, consider your next steps.

- **If the student has had suicidal thoughts or is self-harming, immediately follow your district's/school's protocol and also notify the International Student Program lead/custodian.**
- If the student appears to be depressed — as per the *Knowing If It's More Than Low Mood* section — follow your program's/district's/school's protocol for seeking medical help for a student, including informing their parents.
- To learn more about what medical treatment for depression can look like, refer to HealthLinkBC's *Depression in Children and Teens*. Also, see the *Resources* section.
- For all students who are experiencing low mood or depression:
 - Have frequent and regular check-ins with the student to see how they are doing, look for changes in their symptoms, and to support them. Revisit the *Knowing If It's More Than Low Mood* section of the worksheet, and act accordingly.
 - Work with their classroom teachers on ways to support the student in the classroom. (See *Resources*). For example, if a student finds it challenging to complete a large assignment, the teacher might help them break it into smaller, more manageable pieces.

Program-wide Strategies to Address Low Mood and Depression

Depression is caused by a combination of factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress and brain chemistry. Some people develop depression following a major stressor (e.g. relationship breakup, moving to a new country) or significant trauma (e.g. death in the family, abuse or neglect).

While you can't prevent the risk of depression in students, there are ways to reduce the risk.

Effective strategies include:

- Ensuring that students have a sense of belonging, with social connections and a robust support network
- Addressing bullying where it exists
- Intentional skill-building to help students improve stress management, social-emotional, and executive skills.

Learning opportunities that help develop realistic thinking, problem-solving, goal-setting, positive coping and stress management skills benefit all students. However, they provide the most benefit to those students who are struggling.

Designing your international student program to foster strong connections between the students and their teachers, and other adults who support them will help prevent depression. It will also encourage students who need help to reach out earlier before there is a crisis.

Lastly, developing and implementing a protocol for students struggling with mood issues will ensure they get the best possible support. The protocol should align with existing district/school protocols for students experiencing mental health problems. It should also consider:

- When and how the International Student Program/ custodian is informed
- When and how the parents are informed
- Whether local medical diagnosis or treatment will be sought
- Whether such treatment is available in the student's preferred language
- What to do when the student is considered a risk to themselves or others
- What the process is for determining whether the student returns home, including who is involved in the decision-making.

Resources

Depression and Low Mood

Depression in Children and Teens

HealthLinkBC

Provides up-to-date information for BC residents, and diagnosis and treatment information.

Depression: Treatment with Psychotherapy and Lifestyle Changes

Sick Kids' Hospital/About Kids Health

Includes information on lifestyle changes, cognitive behaviour therapy and other treatment approaches.

Low Mood & Depression

FoundryBC

This student-focused webpage provides signs and symptoms, tips, a mood self-check and a thoughtful list of apps and tools.

Healthy Eating

Canada's Food Guide Snapshot

Health Canada

A 2-page visual snapshot of Canada's Food Guide in 30+ languages, with additional detail in English.

Skill-building for Students

Dealing with Depression Online

Bilsker, Gilbert et al. at Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction (SFU)/PHSA/BC Children's Hospital

This interactive website includes modules on realistic thinking, problem-solving and goal-setting, valuable skills in preventing and addressing depression.

Essential Study Skills: Time Management

Algonquin College

Although this website targets university students, it provides clear, sound strategies for improving your time management skills. It includes quizzes, tips and tools.

Virtual Field Trip - Stress Management and Coping

School Mental Health Ontario & OPHEA

A series of six lesson plans for secondary students that explore the connection between physical health and mental health. It also includes breathing strategies to cope with stress. Suitable for all students.

Sleep

Essential Study Skills: Sleep

Algonquin College

This website provides clear, sound information on sleep habits that is suitable for secondary students. It includes quizzes, tips and tools.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Anxiety Canada

This three-page document provides tips on improving your sleep habits. It uses simple language that those with limited English skills should understand.

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Experiencing
LOW MOOD
for International
Students



SUPPORTING DISCUSSIONS WITH STUDENTS