



TEACH  
WELL  
ALLIANCE

# Depression

## It's good to talk

This guide will help you and your staff to know what to do if you are concerned about the mental well-being of a member of staff.

[www.teachwellalliance.com](http://www.teachwellalliance.com)

Note: This guide does not replace professional help

## INTRODUCTION

We are familiar with the figure that 1 in 4 of us will suffer mental ill-health during our lifetime. What is less well-known is that, during the period 2011-15, risk of suicide among primary and nursery school teachers was 42 per cent higher than patterns in the broader population of England , according to data released by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

There were 139 suicides among teaching and educational professionals during this period, and almost three quarters (73 per cent) of these – or 102 suicides – were recorded as primary and nursery schoolteachers.

The reasons for the higher rate of suicides in primary and nursery teachers are complex. One explanation is that the nurturing role of primary and nursery teachers clashes with the culture of driving and measuring attainment through school results.

Whatever the cause, we need to look out for our teacher colleagues. It focuses on how to look out for colleagues who may be struggling with depression and how to take the first steps to letting them know you are there for them.

**This guide is not intended to be a substitute for professional help.**

*Steve Waters*

Teach Well Alliance

# What is depression?

Feeling down or sad or having the 'blues', especially when faced with challenges or emotionally difficult life events, is part of life and is not depression. However, if we notice that one of our colleagues is 'feeling low', asking them how they are feeling might help them through a difficult time and prevent them going on to develop clinical depression. This is especially the case if they are suffering a major life event, such as serious illness in the family or loss of a relationship.

Clinical depression is an **illness, not a choice**.

Signs are:

- Unusual sadness which lasts for at least two weeks
- Affects the whole person: physically, emotionally and cognitively
- Affects personal relationships
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that the sufferer previously enjoyed
- Lack of energy and extreme tiredness
- Inability to sleep and/or waking early or sleeping too much
- Feeling guilty without reason
- Lack of confidence and low self-esteem
- Loss of interest in food, or over-eating
- Slowness of movement or agitation
- Wishing they were dead or having suicidal thoughts

- Mild Depression: 4 of these signs over past 2 weeks
- Moderate Depression: 6 of these signs over past 2 weeks
- Severe Depression: 8 out of 10 signs over the past 2 weeks

# The signs of depression

Less communicative than usual

Increasingly working alone and apart from other teachers

Uncharacteristic irritability and short-temper

Intermittent absenteeism

Presenteeism (at school but struggling to cope)

Looking tired and/or saying that they are tired

Unexplained weight loss

Expressing that they are worried (Anxiety is often overlooked in depression)

Slowness of movement, taking longer to reply

Difficulty making decisions or concentrating

# How you can help

**1. Ask your colleague how they are. Choose a time and a space when you are both able to have a conversation where other people can't overhear**

'I've noticed that:

- you're looking very tired.
- you've been working more on your own recently
- you are looking a bit sad at the moment

How are you?'

**2. Listen to what they say and avoid judgement or advice. Give them time to answer. Don't interrupt. Be aware of their tone of voice and body language.**

**3. Ask what you can do to help**

'How can I/we help?'

**4. Don't promise confidentiality, even if the person asks. If they give you information which indicates that their life or health is in serious danger, you may need to call emergency services to keep them safe.**

If the person asks you to keep information to yourself:

'I will keep our conversation confidential if I can. But, if I feel that your health or well-being are in danger, I will need to inform other people. Is that OK with you?'

**5. Suggest next steps**

'May I suggest that (e.g):

- you tell [the Headteacher] how you feel. I can go with you, if it helps.
- you arrange to see your doctor
- you contact the Education Support Partnership. They have a 24 hour helpline with trained counsellors'.

# What **not** to say...

- Pull yourself together
- It could be worse
- You've got so much to be thankful for
- Think about how your partner, children, friends, other teachers might feel if they knew what you were thinking
- You should be grateful you aren't coping with my problems
- You just need a good sleep and it'll look different in the morning
- Wow! I can see why you're feeling low. I would be too, in your situation
- Someone else I know was feeling exactly like you. What they did to get out of it was...
- I don't think you ought to tell anyone else what you've told me. They might feel you can't cope with teaching
- Don't talk like that! Life is precious
- I have found praying to God helpful. Are you religious?

Remember: You are not there to solve your colleague's problems. Your role is to support, listen and suggest next steps so that they can ultimately solve their own problems. Support might entail the school making accommodations to help your colleague.

# Becoming a talking school

The most effective way in which your school can help with depression is to promote a staff well-being culture. This sends the message that everyone in the school community supports one another. It also encourages teachers and support staff to talk about their mental health and feelings, alongside physical health.

Committing to a staff well-being culture can also prevent staff developing clinical depression. Staff are more likely to offer help at an early stage before medical intervention is essential.



**'Hello! I am Steve Waters, founder of the Teach Well Alliance. I have over 40 years' experience as a teacher and educational consultant.**

**'I am a qualified counsellor and Mental Health First Aider. I have experienced depression and burnout during my career.**

**'I have combined my professional and personal experience to create the Teach Well Toolkit, a program delivered in partnership with your school to create a culture of staff well-being. My contact details are on the back page, if you would like to get in touch'.**



TEACH  
WELL  
TOOLKIT

[www.teachwellalliance.com](http://www.teachwellalliance.com)

[www.teachwellallianceresources.com](http://www.teachwellallianceresources.com)

[steve@teachwellalliance.com](mailto:steve@teachwellalliance.com)

07504 635 431