Children and young people are living restricted lives during COVID-19. The pandemic creates the perfect conditions for children to be at risk for depression because they are not able to hug friends, go to school or engage in all their regular activities.

How can I help children if they are down or withdrawn?
HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH SUCH A SITUATION:

- **Check in regularly** and spend some one-on-one time with your child. Help your child to feel understood by using validating words such as “I understand” and “that sounds difficult”. Let them know you love them. Avoid interjecting or saying things such as “Well, other people in the world have it a lot worse”, as these comments are invalidating for your child.

- **Help your child develop a sense of hope** for the future and develop a family plan. Children and young people with depression are often very negative, and they feel hopeless for the future, as if they are unlikely to get better. Help your child to see that this is just a point in time and that there will be an end point.

- **Build up a healthy daytime routine** with a focus on pleasant activities. When your child is starting to withdraw, it's helpful to have a visual chart to help orient your child to the day ahead. The routine should have a strong focus on allowing your child to engage in pleasant activities. Bear in mind that if your child is depressed, they are likely to be unable to concentrate for long periods of time, so it will be important to build up a set of activities gradually as their ability to engage and attend to tasks will be limited.

- **Use a stepped approach** to build engagement with online learning. When it comes to online learning, lighten the load, include lots of breaks and mix up online learning activities with other activities that are likely to foster a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment for your child. If your child is struggling to engage in their online learning, don’t give up – build up tolerance gradually. Start with an initial amount of time to focus on online learning. This might start off being relatively short – half hour, for example. Then gradually build up the amount of time over some weeks.

- **Balance screen use** with physical, family and educational activities. Over-reliance on screens for things such as Netflix and gaming are unhelpful. Mix it up, so your child gets to the end of the day feeling as if they have mastered and accomplished something other than getting to the next level.

- **Encourage your child's social connections** by allowing contact with friends to help your child, especially young people, process and support each other during these stressful times. If your child does misbehave, try not to use their social interactions with friends as a punishment.

- **Encourage family time** and some time out of bedrooms. When young people are depressed, they can appear distant, remote and disengaged, preferring to stay in their bedroom. However, shared activities with families are pleasant and can help lift them out of their depressed mood.

- **Make time for physical activity** and encourage your child to engage in 30 minutes of physical activity each day. Make sure the exercise occurs at least two hours before bedtime.

- **Maintain a healthy eating** and sleep schedule. Keep a regular sleep schedule, avoid daytime napping, get some natural light in the mornings and encourage regular healthy eating patterns.

- **Be prepared** to hear about your child's suicidal thoughts. If your child appears depressed, be prepared to ask your child about whether they are experiencing suicidal thoughts. Don’t sweep your child's symptoms under the rug, and seek advice from your GP.

Working together as a family to make a plan for a depressed child is imperative, and there are lots of things you can do in the home environment that will help. If your child continues to display symptoms, make sure you book in to see a GP and discuss the benefits of treatment.

**LINKS TO KEY SUPPORT SERVICES**

**CENTRE FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH CLINIC**
Maccarlie University
T: (02) 9850 8668
E: ehc.admin@mq.edu.au
mq.edu.au/CEH-clinic

**IN CASE OF A CRISIS, CONTACT**
- **ACT**: 1800 629 354 – Mental Health Triage Service
- **NSW**: 1800 011 511 – Mental Health Line
- **NT**: 1800 682 288 – Northern Territory Mental Health Line
- **QLD**: 1300 MH CALL or 1300 642 255 – 24-hour specialist mental healthcare
- **SA**: 13 14 65 – Mental Health Triage Service
- **TAS**: 1800 332 368 – Mental Health Service Helpline
- **VIC**: Victoria's Mental Health Services – See website for services in your area
- **WA**: 1800 676 822 – Mental Health Emergency Response Line

**LIFELINE**
T: 13 11 14

**KIDS HELPLINE**
T: 1800 55 1800
kidshelpline.com.au

**HEAD TO HEALTH (AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT)**
headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support

**BEYOND BLUE**
Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service
T: 1800 512 348
A dedicated COVID-19 online forum is available for people to share their concerns and connect online to support one another.
coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au

**REACH OUT**
Online youth forums and online parents forums for COVID-19 offer peer support in safe and established online communities.
ureachout.com

**MINDSPOT CLINIC**
T: 1800 61 44 34
E: contact@mindsplot.org.au
mindsplot.org.au

**HEADSPACE**
headspace.org.au

**AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**
psychology.org.au/FindAPsychologist

In an emergency, dial 000.