



# All about feeling down

A booklet for young people with learning disabilities

Pictures by Maxine Latham

Design by Grasshopper Green

Words by Ruth Townsley and Julian Goodwin,  
Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol

Thank you to young people and staff at Warmley Park School in Bristol and Emma Wilson, Charlotte Hall and Nick McKerrow from Generate for their help with making this booklet. They looked at the words and pictures and said what they thought. We listened to their ideas, then changed things to make the booklet better.

The Foundation would like to thank the Baily Thomas Charitable Fund, for supporting this work.



## About this booklet

This booklet is for young people with learning disabilities aged 14 to 25.

This booklet is about what you can do if you feel down. It would be a good idea to ask someone you trust to help you think and talk about things in the booklet. You might want to ask them to read it with you.

As you grow up, changes can feel hard to deal with. But there can be exciting times too.

Everyone has ups and downs, especially about growing up.

## Growing up

As you grow up lots of things change.

You might leave school and go to college. You might do work experience or volunteering. You might do other new things, like go to a day centre or get a job. You might move home and live somewhere new. You may have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

All these changes can be fun and exciting. But they can feel strange, confusing and scary too. You will probably have lots of different feelings as you grow up.



## Changes to your body

You might feel excited about the future. You might feel worried about what might change.

Your body changes as you change from a child to an adult. If you are a young woman, you will start your periods. If you are a young man, your voice will get deeper and you might start to grow hair on your face.

The changes in your body can affect the way you feel. Some girls feel down just before their period, or at other times of the month. Boys can feel up and down at different times too.

## Feeling up and down



Feeling up and down is part of being a teenager. You might feel happy one day but sad or down the next. Everyone feels like this. It is ok to feel down.

## What can get you down?



There are lots of things that can get you down. Growing up and moving on often means leaving someone, or something behind.

When you leave school you might leave friends and teachers behind. If you move home you might leave family and friends behind. These changes can make you feel very sad or confused.

There are lots of other things that can get you down too:

- When you are ill, or worried about your health.
- Arguments with your friends or family.
- Teasing and bullying can make you very sad and worried.
- You can feel very sad, scared and angry when someone dies.

## What's it like to feel down?

We are all different. Everyone feels down in different ways.

You might feel very quiet and just want to be on your own. You might cry a lot. You might want to shout or scream.

People talk about feeling down in different ways too. Here are some words that people use to explain their feelings:

- Sad
- Angry
- Scared
- Stressed
- Upset
- Worried
- Confused



When you are growing up, you might have some of these feelings just once in a while. Or you might feel down more often. Some people feel down for a few hours, or days. Other people feel down for longer.

When you're feeling a bit down, the first step is to look after yourself. Doing things you enjoy can really help. You might find that this is all you need to feel good again.

## Be good to yourself



Here are some ideas for you to try.

- Listening to your favourite tape or CD.
- Reading a magazine or book.
- Having a relaxing bath.
- Going for a walk.
- Spending time with your friends.
- Buying yourself something nice.
- Getting your hair cut.
- Eating your favourite food.
- Watching TV or a video.
- Doing some exercise, like swimming or dancing.

But you'll have your own thoughts about what works for you.



## Share your feelings

Maybe you have been feeling down for a while now. Perhaps you have tried to cope with a worry on your own, but can't seem to sort it out. Maybe you feel scared, angry or sad and the feeling just won't go away.

Don't struggle on your own. There is always someone who can help. Telling someone how you feel can make your worries seem less scary. And it's good to let your feelings out so they don't build up.



## Find someone to talk to

Talk to an adult who knows you well. This might be your mum, dad or carer. They care about you and want you to be happy.

Sometimes you might not want to talk to your mum, dad or carer when you feel down. There are lots of other adults you can talk to, like your grandparents, key worker, teacher, social worker, or youth worker.

Talk to your friends. Share your feelings. You never know, they may even be having the same worries as you!

Looking after yourself, or talking to someone is often enough to help you feel good again.

Sometimes you might feel very down. The feelings might last for several weeks. They will not go away. You might need to talk to your GP and get some extra help to feel better.



## Feelings when you are really down

Each person is different but here are some of the things that may happen to you if you are really down.

- You may think that that things are really bad and that nothing can make you feel better.
- You may think that nothing good will happen in the future.
- You may feel more tired than usual and not wish to get up in the morning.
- You may find it difficult to sleep.
- You may lose interest in food or you may want to eat lots more than usual, especially things you like.
- You may no longer enjoy things that you enjoyed before, like going out with your friends or family.
- You may find it difficult to make choices or decisions.
- You may cry more often than usual.
- You may get cross more often than usual.
- You may feel unwell, for example have headaches or stomach upsets.

You may want to talk to someone you trust about getting the support you need. They can help you to make an appointment to see your GP.

## Talking to your GP

Tell your GP, or family doctor how you feel. They can help work out what is making you feel down and give you the right treatment.

Different sorts of treatments might be:

- Taking time off school, college or work to relax at home
- Taking some medicine to make you feel better
- Talking to another health worker, like a psychologist or counsellor.



## Keep on feeling good – top 10 tips

You already know about some things you can do to look after yourself when you feel down. But what can you do to help yourself feel good as you grow up? You may need some help from someone you trust to do some of these things.

### **1. Keep in touch with your family and friends**

Meet up as often as you can. Do things together that you all enjoy. Keep in touch with old friends, even if you don't live near each other anymore. Phone them. Email them. Text them.

### **2. Talk to friends about your worries or problems**

Find one or two people in your life who you can really share your feelings with. Listen to their worries too. Help each other to talk about how you feel as you grow up.



### **3. Do things you enjoy**

There are loads of ways to spend your free time. Some people like to do things at home, like watching TV, playing computer games or listening to music. Other people like to go out to pubs, clubs, cinemas or restaurants. You could learn a new skill, like photography or cooking. Or you could take up a hobby.



### **4. Look after your health**

Get your eyes, ears and teeth checked regularly. Ask your doctor or nurse if you need any other checks to keep your body healthy. Try to eat healthy food that you enjoy. If you need a snack, try fruit or nuts instead of crisps and chocolate. Don't drink too much alcohol, tea, coffee or sugary drinks. Get outside and do some exercise. A short walk in the fresh air can help you feel good.

### **5. Take time to relax**

Be good to yourself. If you feel stressed, take time to breathe slowly and deeply. This can help to calm you down. So can things like music, a relaxing bath and aromatherapy.

## **6. Find ways to spend your time during the day**

If you are still at school think about what you want to do when you leave. You could go to college or do some training. You could do work experience or volunteering. You might want to go to a day centre or get a job. Talk to your friends and family. Ask your teacher to help you find out more.

## **7. Get up and go!**

Try something active like dancing, swimming, or gardening. Exercise makes you feel good and you may make new friends.

## **8. Speak up for yourself**

Self-advocacy groups help people with learning disabilities get better at speaking up for themselves. They have meetings where you can learn new things and meet new people. There are self-advocacy groups in lots of places. Your teacher, or social worker can help you find one near you.





## **9. Let it all out**

Sometimes you might not want to talk to someone about how you feel. Some people like to be on their own instead. But there are still lots of ways to let your feelings out. You could draw a picture or make a tape of your favourite music. You could sing or shout. You could punch a cushion or a pillow. Find a way that works for you. (But don't do anything that might hurt yourself or other people.)

## **10. Get in touch with your feelings**

Think and talk about things that happen in your life. How do they make you feel? Try to explain your feelings to your friends, or someone you trust. Or you could draw, sign or write about your feelings. Learning to understand your feelings can help you to cope with life's ups and downs.



## Websites

All these websites are aimed at young people. They have lots of information to help if you feel down and about how to feel good about yourself. You might want to ask someone you trust to help you find these websites on a computer.

### **[www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk](http://www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk)**

This website is for young people aged 14-16. It has lots of information about how to keep healthy and feel good.

### **[www.rethink.org/at-ease](http://www.rethink.org/at-ease)**

At Ease is a website for young people. It is especially for those who feel stressed, or worried about their thoughts and feelings. It has lots of information to help you cope when you feel down.

### **[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)**

This website is for people who feel confused or worried about their feelings. It helps you to understand why you feel down, and where to find help.



## Telephone helplines

When you feel down, talking about your feelings can help. But sometimes you might not want to talk to someone you know.

There are other people who can help. You can phone a telephone helpline, like Childline or the Samaritans.

Helplines like these give free advice over the phone to children and young people who need someone to talk to. They are confidential. This means they won't tell anyone about your call unless you want them to.

If you need help to use the phone, find someone you trust to help you.

### Childline

Childline is a free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people. You can call the helpline about any problem, at any time, day or night.

**Telephone: 0800 11 11**

Textphone: 0800 400 222

### The Samaritans

You can call the Samaritans about anything that is troubling you, 24 hours a day.

Calls are not free, but they can phone you back if you ask them to.

Or you can email them.

**Telephone: 08457 90 90 90**

Email: [jo@samaritans.org.uk](mailto:jo@samaritans.org.uk)



## Other booklets

All these booklets are easy to understand for people with learning disabilities.

### **Getting better. Keeping your mind healthy**

From Learning Disability Directorate, Olive Mount,  
Old Mill Lane, Liverpool, L15 8LW.

**Tel: 0151 250 3000 x288**

### **Depression. What is depression? What causes depression? What treatments are available?**

From Change, Units 19/20, Unity Business Centre,  
26 Roundhay Road, Leeds, LS7 1AB.

**Tel: 0113 243 0202**

### **Coping with stress**

From BILD Publications,  
Plymbridge Distributors,  
Plymbridge House, Plymouth, PL6 7PZ.

**Tel: 01752 202301**

### **Feeling blue**

From Book Sales,  
Royal College of Psychiatrists,  
17 Belgrave Square,  
London, SW1X 8PG.

**Tel: 020 7235 2351 x146**





**The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities works with people with learning disabilities to improve their lives. It funds projects for research and to develop services. It provides information and seeks to influence policy.**

**The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities**

83 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0HW

**Tel: 020 7802 0300**

Fax: 020 7802 0301

Email: [fpld@fpld.org.uk](mailto:fpld@fpld.org.uk)  
[www.learningdisabilities.org.uk](http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk)

Reg. Charity No 801130

©The Mental Health Foundation

Published by The Mental Health Foundation

April 2003

Price £2.00

ISBN 1 903645 395